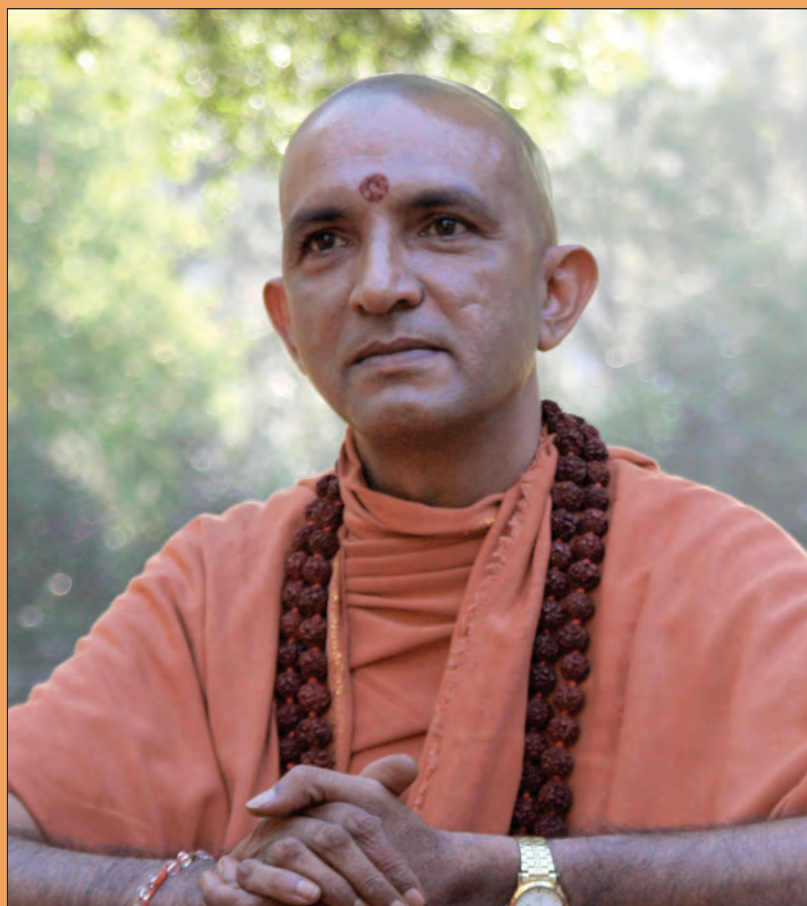


2013 Golden Jubilee edition

BIHAR YOGA®

VOLUME SIX

YOGA SADHANA PANORAMA



Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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VOLUME SIX



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YOGA SADHANA PANORAMA

VOLUME SIX

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

*Satsangs and Lectures given in Australia and Europe in
2006, 2008 and 2009*



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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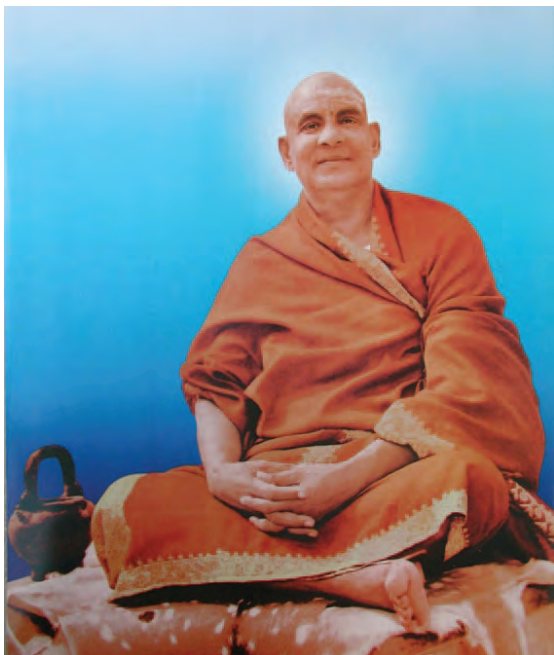
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*

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Ankaran, Slovenia

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Brittany, France,

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The Four Stages of Yoga

To understand yoga, we have to understand life. In the West, yoga is recognized as physical, mental or spiritual. In physical yoga, there is a lot of stretching, twisting and bending. In psychological yoga, there are practices of concentration and meditation. In the spiritual dimension of yoga, there is cultivation of the positive qualities of life. In general, yoga has been understood in this way until now. However, by looking at the development and growth of yoga through the centuries, it can be understood that yoga in the life of an individual is experienced in four stages.

The first stage is yoga practice, the second stage is yoga sadhana, the third stage is yogic lifestyle and the fourth stage is imbibing the yogic culture. If yoga is looked at from this perspective, not only in relation to our life today but also in relation to the final outcome possible in the experience of human evolution, the relevance of yoga can be understood. This understanding of yoga has been the teaching and vision of Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda, the two masters and luminaries of our tradition.

Yoga, life and tantra

Yoga has to be linked with our life, and therefore it is necessary to understand life. In order to understand life, let us use the example of infinite space and infinite time. In infinite space and infinite time, existence or life as we know it is a continuous flat line. At times, a spike comes up in this flat line. That spike

represents us, the life we experience confined to a range in space and time. When that spike comes down, we again become part of eternal space and eternal time. Thus, in the flat line of existence in eternal time and space we are only spikes. That is our life, our existence. The spike represents our time, our space and our perceptions of the world at a particular moment.

In this life we experience the development or destruction of the human faculties and consciousness. In the past, thinkers contemplated the role of life in the greater scheme of things, just as today we think of our life in relation to society, our position and status. Just as we think about financial gains and losses, once upon a time people thought about their life in relation to the universe, cosmos and divine nature. They tried to discover the relationship of the individual with the universal existence. They came to the conclusion that the human body and life is nothing but an expression of consciousness and energy; the body and the senses are only a medium through which consciousness and energy express themselves. The way to awaken the forces and the qualities of consciousness and energy was devised into a system known as tantra.

The word *tantra* means liberation of energy and expansion of the horizons of consciousness. The philosophy or idea of the human being as an expression of consciousness and energy was developed in tantra. According to tantra, self-realization, God-realization or freedom is the outcome of an awakened consciousness and awakened energy. The same consciousness and energy when confined by the mind and the senses becomes responsible for our physical existence.

Yoga came as an offshoot or branch of tantra to direct the energies, to understand and awaken the human consciousness, to understand and free the energy contained in this body. Thus, the foundations of yoga are in tantra and the purpose of yoga is to work with human consciousness to sublimate the restrictive and negative tendencies and also to awaken the energy field of the body, which helps to harmonize the human character. However, in the mid-fifties, when yoga came out into society from its habitat in the Himalayas, it was as

a physical practice with a greater focus on the body and the different states the body can achieve through the performance and practices of asanas.

In the beginning, yoga was used for maintenance of the physical body, for trimming the body, losing weight and getting into shape. Later, with new discoveries about the practices, yoga became a way of stress management. Thereafter, it became a way to internalize the consciousness and awaken the dormant faculties. Everyone thought they could become realized with the practice of yoga within a short time, forgetting that evolution takes its own time. A child born today takes many years to grow up; a seed planted today takes many years to grow into a big tree. So how can a few practices of meditation give enlightenment in one week, one month or one year? Nevertheless, people did become overnight prophets through yoga with their eyes on profit.

Today, yoga has to be seen as an alternative lifestyle to manage the negative influences in life. Let us look at the four different dimensions of yoga: yoga practice, yoga sadhana, yoga lifestyle and yoga culture. These four stages are linked; practice has to evolve into sadhana, sadhana has to evolve into lifestyle and lifestyle has to evolve into culture.

Yoga practice

People often believe that regular practice of yoga is yoga sadhana, but it is not. When yoga is practised according to personal needs and desires, as an experiment to satisfy one's curiosity and aspirations, that is yoga practice, not yoga sadhana. When there is no proper understanding of yoga, yoga remains a practice. There are thousands of yoga students in the world who have physical, psychological and emotional needs, who are stressed out, and they come to a yoga class to stretch, relax and calm down. A few days later when they are stressed again, they join a stretching yoga class and leave happy that they have done something for themselves. Then they hear of another yoga teacher who is teaching hot yoga, yoga and sauna, so they go there to detoxify out of curiosity. Then they hear of a teacher who is awakening the kundalini,

so they go there to fulfil their curiosity. Then they hear of yoga combined with aerobics, so they can practise yoga and aerobics together and save time.

Yoga practice is to fulfil a particular need. You choose a practice and when you find that you have attained the result, or the result seems too far, you drop the practice. Sometime later, inspired by somebody, some idea or some thought, you start again. Then you stop again and go on a sabbatical for a few months. This on and off dabbling in yoga and using yoga for a personal purpose we call flirting with yoga. We create an aim according to our desire and needs, which are mundane and gross, and we try to use yoga to attain those goals. When our interest gradually wanes, we distance ourselves from the inspiration which initially brought us to yoga. Even those who practise kundalini yoga are flirting with it and not doing it as sadhana because they have not done the basic preparation to have subtle experiences.

Ninety-nine percent of people in the world flirt with yoga. Yoga practice is to fulfil personal needs and aspirations and when they are fulfilled, yoga has no more relevance in one's life. At this stage, yoga remains a practice.

Yoga sadhana

If this is the situation with yoga practice, then what is yoga sadhana? *Sadhana* means involvement in the practice leading to perfection. Following one's own aspirations is not sadhana. Yoga sadhana is experienced when the aims of yoga are followed. The aim of yoga is not stress management, not learning how to concentrate or meditate, not learning how to become a teacher.

The *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali define three main aims of yoga in the first three opening statements. The first aim of yoga is harmony through discipline, achieving a disciplined nature. That is the first sutra of the *Yoga Sutras*. *Atha yoga anushasanam*, discovering the harmonious nature of being through discipline. Discipline means regulating the normal patterns of thinking and behaving. Discipline does not mean imposed restrictions, but an awareness of the

subtle processes influencing the outer behaviour. The word *anushasan* is generally translated as discipline, but from the yogic perspective it means to govern, to direct, to realize the subtle mental behaviours which influence external life.

Discipline is focusing and uniting the dissipated energies. When mind, emotions and performance converge and work together as one that is the attainment of yogic discipline. The yamas and niyamas help us find inner balance and inner discipline. Asanas help us find physical stability and discipline. Pratyahara and dharana help us find mental and emotional discipline. Dhyana helps us find spiritual discipline. In this process, there are five requirements: awareness, analysis and understanding, modification of the personality, adjustment with the external environment and nature, and creating harmony between oneself and the outer environment. Attaining these five states represents the concept of knowing the subtle processes of mental behaviour, or discipline. Using yoga to come to this point of balance is yoga sadhana, not yoga practice.

The second aim of yoga is mind management, managing the vrittis, the dissipated states of mind, *Yoga chitta vritti nirodhah*. In order to understand and train the mind and develop the inherent quality of our mind, we need an in-depth understanding of the mental processes. Vrittis are expressions of the mind which hold the attention fixed on a particular experience or event. Reacting to abuse is a vritti. Feeling elated due to praise is a vritti. Feeling dejected when criticized is a vritti. The different situations in life bring about different responses and create different behaviours in the mind. These mental vrittis manifest all the time in our daily lives, like waves in the ocean which come and dash on the shore. Managing these mental behaviours, containing inner agitation, is the second aim of yoga after attaining personal discipline.

The third aim of yoga is to develop the awareness to such an extent that you can become the observer of your actions, *Tada drashtahswarupeavasthanam*. When you become the witness of all that transpires in your life, you become the

master of your life. The consciousness is elevated to a higher level where life can be seen from a different perspective. The higher you elevate your consciousness, the better perspective you have. You are able to see a bigger picture from above. This happens when you become the *drashta*, the witness of yourself. We are not able to observe ourselves because we are involved with ourselves and the faculty of observation goes into the background. When we begin to observe, there is reduced involvement with the obsessive nature which binds us to the senses and sense objects, which craves for pleasure and rebels against things which do not give pleasure. This is Sage Patanjali's third sutra, to become the witness and the master, to realize one's true nature and not hide behind a false identity.

Becoming the *drashta* or witness relates to the development of inner emotions. One becomes the witness, not of the inner nature, but of the nurturing qualities, the human sentiments. When the mind and emotions are harmonized and integrated, that union of mind and heart manifests in human behaviour.

The other *yogas* also have defined aims contained in their theory and philosophy. The purpose of *karma yoga* is to become the master of one's interactions. The purpose of *bhakti yoga* is learning how to manage emotion. The purpose of *jnana yoga* is to transcend the intellect and connect with inner wisdom. The purpose of *kundalini yoga* is to be in tune with the higher experiences of existence. Every branch of *yoga* has its own defined aim.

Very few people use *yoga* to attain the aims defined by *yoga*. Those who follow the principles and practices of *yoga* to attain one or all of these aims are recognized as *yoga sadhakas* and their practice is recognized as *yoga sadhana*. Practising *yoga* not only to stretch the body but to become disciplined so that harmony is experienced is *yoga sadhana*. Practising *yoga* to manage the modifications of the mind and develop the mental faculties and qualities, not only as stress management, becomes *sadhana*. Practising *yoga* to cultivate the awareness to such an extent that you become the observer of yourself

is yoga sadhana Using yoga to achieve the goals set by yoga, and being devoted, dedicated, sincere and committed to it, is yoga sadhana. So you have to ask yourself whether you are a yoga practitioner or a yoga sadhaka.

Sadhana means attaining perfection through constant effort. Attainment of personal discipline, management of the mind and cultivation of consciousness are the three defined aims of raja yoga which constitute sadhana.

Most people believe discipline involves too many restrictions. However, from the yogic perspective, discipline does not involve restriction; rather, it is fine-tuning the personal radio in order to receive a clear signal. When you turn on a radio and it is not tuned to a station, all it gives is static noise. It is the same with television. If all the channels appeared on the screen at the same time, you could not look at any for the images are superimposed on each other. When the tuning is right, only one channel will appear and there will be clarity of image and sound.

Just as fine-tuning is necessary to define the frequency of each channel, personal tuning is necessary to define the frequency of each expression of consciousness, mind and energy. That is the concept of discipline. We tune ourselves to the right frequencies in relation to our thoughts, desires, expectations, needs, strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, fine-tuning of our personal receiver is the aim of discipline in yoga. Discipline does not mean restriction. In Sanskrit, *anushasana* means ‘governing the subtle nature of human personality’. Fine-tuning of the personality happens when one is able to follow the progressions in yoga in a systematic way.

When Swami Sivananda taught yoga to his disciples fifty years ago, he said that there had to be a blend of different techniques. In one yoga session, five items of yoga should be practised: one yama, one niyama, asana, pranayama and one concentration practice. He laid down these guidelines. Even today in the ashram environment we follow these guidelines of practising asana, pranayama, concentration and one yama and one niyama in a yoga session. Swami Sivananda

used to say that in order to fine-tune the personality all the different areas of expression have to be accessed. Sensorial distractions and imbalances have to be rectified with the practice of pranayama. Dissipated mental energies have to be channelled with the practice of concentration. To create a change in the behaviour pattern and attitudes of the mind, one yama and one niyama have to be adopted and lived. When this practice is done in the right combination, one attains physical and psychological harmony and the personality is fine-tuned. Therefore, the first attempt in yoga sadhana is to attain discipline or control over the subtle processes of the personality.

When we follow the aims set out in yoga, yoga practice becomes yoga sadhana. It is the consistent, continued effort to attain the goal set by yoga. Among those who practise yoga, maybe only five percent practise yoga sadhana because it involves intense work and constant self-observation.

Yoga lifestyle

In the third stage yoga becomes a lifestyle. About three percent of yoga practitioners fall into this category. Yogic lifestyle is where you begin to express the attainments of yoga in your life, when you begin to live the principles of yoga and apply the techniques of yoga to manage day-to-day situations. At that time, yoga is no longer a practice which you do for a specific period in the morning, afternoon or evening; it becomes a natural expression of life.

Take the example of stress. When stress accumulates, it begins to affect the mind and behaviour. Sometimes it comes in the form of sleeplessness, sometimes it manifests as hypertension. Whatever its form, how do you deal with it? It is easy to pop a pill and go about your normal business, which is what people generally tend to do. However, if you had yoga in your life, you could manage your stress with bhramari pranayama and not require medication to manage your stress.

What would the scenario be for a person using yoga to manage stress? Maybe at work that person will go to the

bathroom, close the door, sit down and practise bhramari ten times and then go back to work. Or maybe he will come home in the evening and instead of sitting down with a glass of beer or wine, practise ten minutes of yoga nidra. Yoga can be used at different times of the day to manage the conditions and states of the body and mind. In this way, one will avoid many physiological and psychological illnesses and stresses which come up in life.

When yoga becomes a lifestyle, it is not something that you practise for an hour in the morning on Wednesdays and Fridays with a yoga teacher in a yoga centre. You use yoga every hour to manage the different conditions that you are confronting. While travelling by car, deep abdominal breathing can be practised. Pranayama can be practised in the office bathroom. Yoga nidra can be practised during the afternoon or evening to release accumulated stress. Five minutes of breath awareness can be practised in the office to clear the mind of confusions and problems and gain clarity. In this manner, yoga becomes part of the natural behaviour of life.

Yoga lifestyle is applying yoga in the daily routines and activities. Yoga becomes a lifestyle when you create an environment conducive to health and wellbeing in the home for the entire family. Living yogic attitudes and practising yogic techniques to improve personal and family wellbeing is yogic lifestyle.

Yogic culture

When yoga is fully incorporated into the lifestyle, when you have gone some way towards fulfilling the three goals set down by yoga, when your mind, behaviour and attitude reflect yogic awareness and you begin to express and connect with the positive, virtuous self, then yoga becomes a culture of life. Culture is the perfect expression of creativity. About two percent of yoga practitioners achieve this level.

The role of yoga can be perceived in our life as practice, sadhana, lifestyle and culture. Ultimately, we have to nourish our personality and nature, and once we are able to recognize this role of yoga in our life, we can actually appreciate yoga.

Achieving the first level

Yoga practice is the first stage. At this stage hatha yoga and parts of raja yoga can be practised. A consolidated practice of hatha yoga and raja yoga together complete the first level. In the West, hatha yoga is generally considered physical yoga and raja yoga is considered part of mental yoga. However, hatha yoga is not physical and raja yoga is not mental. They are practices which bring about a change in the normal behaviour of the body, in the normal conditioning of energy, muscles and organs of the body.

Hatha yoga is the yoga of balancing the solar and lunar forces in the body. The solar force is known as *prana shakti* and the lunar energy is known as *chitta shakti*. Prana shakti is responsible for the movement of the body, the sense organs and the senses. Chitta shakti is responsible for the functioning of the mind. Managing these two forms of energy is the purpose of hatha yoga. Therefore, in the traditional scheme of hatha yoga, the main practices were purification and cleansing the body of toxins. The hatha yoga cleansing techniques detoxify the body from the mouth to the anus. They activate the flow of prana shakti through the channels in the body, awaken the psychic centres or chakras of the body and stimulate the production of hormones from the pineal and pituitary glands. This is the range of hatha yoga. The combination of physical postures, cleansing techniques and chakra activation techniques constitute hatha yoga.

Raja yoga is management of the subtle influences or subtle mental behaviours. Raja yoga comprises four major steps. The raja yoga of Sage Patanjali is called *ashtanga yoga*, which means the yoga of eight limbs. These eight limbs control the behaviour and expression of the body, energy, mind and attitudes. In raja *asana* is defined as a posture in which one is comfortable and steady. When you are sitting on a chair, is it an asana? You may be comfortable and steady, sitting with your legs crossed, but is that an asana? Asana is that posture in which you are at ease with yourself, which means that in asana practice the body has to come to the point of perfect

ease and comfort. Once the body comes to that point of ease and comfort, all the physical imbalances, stresses and tensions are gone. Ease and relaxation of the body is the symptom of a balanced physical body. Such perfect harmony of the body is the outcome of asana.

Another component of raja yoga is pranayama. It is the energy structure component. The ultimate goal of pranayama is to balance the energies. Thereafter, with pratyahara, dharana and dhyana, management of the mind is achieved and there is a gradual sublimation of the mental awareness from gross to subtle to transcendental. The two other components of Sage Patanjali's raja yoga are yama and niyama. Attitudes are managed with the *yamas*, codes of conduct, and behaviour is modified with the practice of *niyamas*, rules of personal discipline. Therefore, the basic practices of hatha yoga and raja yoga develop the personality at all levels from the behavioural aspect to the mental aspect.

Creating the garden of life

This is the process we go through when we practise yoga, not to satisfy the whims of the mind, but to follow and experience the aims set by yoga. Yogic goals are clearly defined: cultivating awareness, disciplining and restructuring the personality, managing the mental and emotional distractions and disturbances, and becoming the observer of one's life and actions. When you have these aims as the focus and are striving to achieve them, you are doing yoga sadhana. When you follow the dictates of your mind, it is yoga practice. When you integrate the practices to aid the development of your potentials, you begin to live a yogic lifestyle.

Yoga is a vast subject. The various components and practices of yoga can be applied to improve the quality of our life. Ultimately, the practices offer hope for betterment of the self. It is not necessary to become a yogi, but it is important to connect with the qualities inherent in us. This is what will make us an awakened and realized human being. We have to put the effort into transforming the barren land of our life into a flowering garden.

Once, a man purchased a barren piece of land. Nothing except stones, rocks, sand and weeds. He worked hard and turned it into a beautiful garden. When the garden was complete, many people came to admire it. One day, a priest came to see the garden and he was so happy at the sight that he exclaimed, “God’s creation is wonderful! Look at this beautiful garden that God has created!” The man said, “No, God did not create this, I’ve done it. You should have seen this piece of land when God owned it! Now that I am the owner, I’ve turned this barren land into a garden through hard work.”

You can do the same. Through your efforts, determination and conviction you can convert your life into a beautiful garden of which you can be proud. You can equip yourselves with the right tools to bring this change to the plot of land on which you live, through the practices of yoga and the right application of wisdom and creativity through yoga. The sankalpa of a yogi is to be a gardener.

Integrating Yoga into the Daily Routine

Both Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda have said that the aim of yoga is integral development of the human personality. Therefore, our approach to practising yoga should be more integrated. We should not only confine ourselves to the practice of physical yoga or meditative yoga, but incorporate certain components into our day-to-day routine. There needs to be a clear and practical understanding of how that can be done. Yoga capsules are a specific sequence of sadhana that you can follow to integrate yoga into your lifestyle. They will help to create a positive and uplifting environment at home, improve mental efficiency, bring creativity into performance, harmonize the emotions and awaken the spirit in the normal, natural environment.

Just as early in the day with breakfast we take vitamin tablets, minerals, spirulina, wheat grass, and so on, to try and regain our composure, health and stamina, similarly there are five yoga capsules that need to be taken daily. The first capsule is mantra chanting on waking. The second and third capsules are asana and pranayama. The fourth capsule is yoga nidra which can be done during the day when required or in the afternoon or evening when you come home from work. The fifth capsule is meditation at night before sleeping.

Capsule 1 – three mantras on waking in the morning

Swami Satyananda has said that on waking up, spiritual aspirants should chant three mantras every morning,

Mahamrityunjaya mantra eleven times, Gayatri mantra eleven times and the thirty-two names of Durga three times. Repeat them when you wake up, sitting in your bed or, if you are not alone, in the bathroom. These three mantras must be chanted first thing in the morning to create protection and develop immunity from physical and psychological stress.

All stressors create a change in the normal, relaxed state of the mind and personality. In daily life, stress usually begins with the sound of the morning alarm clock. Imagine you are sleeping in a deep state of relaxation when the jarring sound of the alarm suddenly awakens you in the morning. It is like throwing a large rock into the still waters of a lake. That unconscious agitation and discomfort remains throughout the day. In yoga, mantra is the method through which we can restore immunity and wellness to our mind and to ourselves. We can use the sensitivity and receptivity of the relaxed state of mind to develop a different quality and character for the day ahead.

The Mahamrityunjaya, Gayatri and Durga mantras are three sankalpas or seeds which are planted in the subconscious when the mind is still, dormant, not active in the waking state, not connected with the senses or sense objects. When we sleep at night, our body and mind relax. There is harmony between the conscious, subconscious and unconscious. When we just wake up, we are on the borderline between the unconscious and the conscious, and that is the time to plant the seed of a sankalpa. It is the same principle that is followed in yoga nidra.

The Mahamrityunjaya mantra has been recognized since time immemorial as the mantra of awakening *prana shakti*, the life-force, and attaining health. It works on manipura chakra in the solar plexus, increasing vitality and creating physical immunity to stress. Stress creates an imbalance in the manifestation and functions of pranic energy, and loss of prana shakti from the body opens the doorway to illnesses and diseases. The sound vibrations and frequencies of the Mahamrityunjaya manta activate the solar plexus, manipura chakra, strengthening weak pranic energy in the

body. The fire of manipura burns the toxins of the body, infusing weak areas with energy and healing defects and imbalances. Once the debilitated shakti is revitalized, it works to release or relieve imbalances, illnesses and diseases from the physiological structure. The Mahamrityunjaya mantra is a healing mantra which increases immunity, on the psychical, mental, emotional, pranic and physical levels, and gives more strength, energy and stamina. Many people have overcome distressing situations with the chanting of the Mahamrityunjaya mantra only. It is the best medicine that one can have to attain wellbeing and fitness.

The Gayatri mantra is associated with *ajna chakra*, the 'third eye', the seat of wisdom and intuition. According to tradition, the Gayatri mantra creates the frequency or vibration which activates ajna chakra and opens the doors of consciousness, knowledge, perception and wisdom. It stops mental agitation, obsessive thinking and behaviour, heals psychological scars and encourages the emergence of a clear and balanced awareness, making one more alert and aware, more in tune and in harmony with oneself. The problems of fear, aggression, anxiety and guilt that we see on our mental or psychic screen can be managed with the activation of ajna chakra.

The Durga mantras remove the causes of distress from life, whatever they may be, known or unknown, conscious or subconscious, circumstantial or created. So Mahamrityunjaya mantra shields the body, Gayatri mantra shields the mind, while the Durga mantras invoke the force that protects us from external negative forces. After waking up, before thinking, before even getting out of bed, sit quietly for five or ten minutes, chant the mantras, and then go about your normal activities. People who follow this system feel a qualitative change in their life, in their thinking, performance, understanding, associations and relationships.

Mantras are sound vibrations, not prayers. If one tried to translate them into another language as a prayer, they would no longer mean what they represent. Each sound vibration creates a different frequency within the personality, because

the body is nothing but compressed energy which responds to vibrations. When a particular state of mind is powerful, it changes the energy field of the body, which becomes like a magnet to attract the corresponding energy. A fearful energy attracts fear, an aggressive energy attracts aggression and a compassionate energy attracts compassion, so whatever you are experiencing in your consciousness changes. That transformation happens not only at the level of the head and mind, but also at the level of the heart, the centre for expressing energies. To iron out the wrinkles in the field of consciousness which create these energy patterns that attract the same forces again and again, the Mahamrityunjaya, Gayatri and Durga mantras are used to demagnetize and strengthen the energies of the body, awaken the creative qualities and remove distress.

Mantras activate the dormant centres of the personality, energy and consciousness fuse together and are sublimated. Activating the chakras gives health, vitality, an expressive nature, dynamism and inner vision. Chanting mantras connects you with the source of strength and inspiration within you, heals the body, senses, emotions and mind and induces deeper understanding and awareness.

The strong syllables of the Mahamrityunjaya mantra, *Tryambakamyajamahe . . .*, create a vibration which removes the influences of *tamas*, or stagnation, from the energy field, *pranamayakosha*. It rearranges the frequencies and vibrations in the body and encourages health and healing. The purpose of Gayatri mantra's soft syllables, *Bhurbhuvahswaha . . .*, is to activate the corresponding centres in the chakras and stimulate the dormant centres in the brain. Intuition awakens and understanding improves, which aids the process of learning and the expression of wisdom. The Durga mantras are also hard-hitting, with the continuous repetition of *Durga*, *Durga*, *Durga*, they remove distress from life.

As you chant the mantras, you should develop the thought of wellbeing in your mind. During the chanting of the Mahamrityunjaya mantra, the thought of physical wellbeing must be the *sankalpa* or focus. During chanting of the Gayatri

mantra, the focus should be on acquiring wisdom. During chanting of the Durga mantras, focus on overcoming distress and experiencing peace. The mantras are chanted first thing in the morning, so they are the first input and positive resolution the mind receives. With regular practice, you will discover that these mantras play a major role in cultivating inner strength, optimism and positivity.

These three mantras should become a part of the daily waking-up process for everyone. Wellbeing is the birthright of all, and those things which give us physical and psychological wellbeing should be adopted to improve the quality of our life. Remember, the secret for the success of these three mantras is chanting them first thing in the morning before the mind becomes extroverted and begins to associate with people, needs, desires and the day's events. When the mind is quiet and peaceful, when there are no distractions, the mantras go deep into the subconscious and create a positive *sankalpa*, or resolution, which helps in attaining inner mental wellbeing. When you wake up in the morning, there are no distractions. If you chant the mantras at this time, the effect is tenfold and your investment in only ten minutes of your early morning.

Capsule 2– asana, before breakfast

The second capsule is asana, to be practised before breakfast. After chanting the three mantras, go about your normal business of taking a shower, cleaning your teeth and preparing for the day's activities. Then practise a few asanas which are important for the general fitness of the body.

Asanas are classified in two groups: dynamic and meditative. Although we begin the practice of postures in a dynamic way, our aim should be to find a meditative state in this dynamic movement. A meditative state means focusing one's awareness and energies. In Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* it is stated, "Asanas are physical postures in which one can be steady and comfortable." Many people believe that this refers to meditative postures only, but it refers to all postures, because every movement of the body is an asana. It becomes an asana when the movement is combined with awareness

and breath, and when the movement is not unconscious or jagged. When the mind and breath are not connected with the movement, the posture is not an asana. It simply remains a movement, uncontrolled, unguided and dissipated. The energies are not harmonized. Even when we are practising dynamic movements, we should be able to combine mental awareness and breath with the movement and experience comfort; we should be able to experience ourselves being centred in that dynamic movement. That is when it becomes an asana.

We spend most of the day sitting, bent forward. The other movements we make do not open up the body but restrict its movement. Sitting for seven or eight hours a day compresses different parts of the body and these pressures create little aches and pains and areas of discomfort. When we don't take care of this condition, it often develops into a weakness, such as spinal, lower back, neck or circulation problems. To free the body from the stresses of daily life, we need to move, contract and expand our body.

For a normal, healthy person only a few asanas are important. These asanas stretch the body in every possible way, release tensions and tightness, free up the stiff muscles and joints, improve blood circulation throughout the body, increase lung capacity and improve the physical state during the day. The first is *tadasana*, the palm tree pose. Tadasana stretches the body and provides traction, releasing pressure from the joints and vertebrae which often comes from lack of exercise and excess sitting. The second asana is *tiryak tadasana*, the swaying palm tree pose. It is simple yet effective for on one side a lateral stretch is taking place and on the other compression, so that tension from the sides of the body is released. It also realigns defects of the spine. The third asana is *kati chakrasana*, waist rotating pose. It is a spinal twist in which you twist the body and squeeze the internal organs, removing stagnant blood and improving the circulation of fresh blood to the organs, muscles and joints. The fourth practice is *surya namaskara*, salute to the sun, in which the major movements are forward bending and backward bending. Through these

asanas we cover five different movements: traction, lateral stretch, twist, forward and backward bending. Only one more asana needs to be practised, an inverted asana, to reverse the force of gravity in the body. However, inverted asanas are slightly more complex and should be practised only under guidance.

Pawanmuktasana is another series of postures which are important to maintain the yogic body. The pawanmuktasana series is divided in two groups: anti-rheumatic, which remove stiffness and improve flexibility, and anti-gastric, which improve digestion so there is a greater feeling of physical wellbeing and health.

Do the five asanas on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and practise pawanmuktasana on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Always remember to combine breath awareness with the movement. This is a good routine to free up the body, energize the body, improve circulation, induce better breathing and connect with the body. In this way you will be able to find a balance in asana practice and be able to practise the important postures necessary to maintain yogic awareness.

Capsule 3 – pranayama, after asana

The third capsule is pranayama, to be practised after asana or during the day when required. Two pranayamas are important for daily practice. The first is *nadi shodhana*, alternate nostril breathing. In nadi shodhana the breath should be equal during inhalation and exhalation. Regulating the breath helps to effectively manage nervous agitations, tension and depression. To relax hyperactivity, begin the practice on the left side. Practise five to seven rounds. You will become focused and centred in a natural spontaneous way. This practice balances the functions of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems and clears the pranic channels. The focus should be on equalizing inhalation and exhalation. Regulated breathing activates the pranic field around the body. The pranas begin to flow with greater ease and a state of psychological and mental relaxation is experienced.

The second practice is *bhramari pranayama*, humming bee breath. Bhramari creates a particular frequency of vibration inside the brain which releases cerebral, nervous and hormonal agitations, so you move into a space of tranquillity, peace and contentment. It is a powerful practice to calm nervous agitation and develop better concentration and awareness. It is also a preparation for higher stages of meditation, helping to internalize the sensory perceptions. This practice is useful to lower high blood pressure due to stress. It is very useful for cerebral fatigue.

The majority of stress-related problems can be managed with these two pranayamas. They can be practised during the day when you are mentally fatigued, to relieve stress, clear the mind, improve memory and concentration and infuse the body with new energy. When you are at work, you can practise pranayama in the bathroom, and come out peaceful and smiling.

So the morning practice, before breakfast, consists of the three mantras on waking, then asana and pranayama.

Capsule 4 – yoga nidra

The fourth capsule is yoga nidra, ten minutes of deep relaxation, after work or social involvement, or when feeling tired or stressed. Stress accumulates during the day's activities. When we are not relaxed, the tension goes deep into our system, altering the behaviour of the body, mind and emotions. Tiredness, irritability, lethargy, anxiety, frustration and aggression manifest. Cultivate the habit of practising yoga nidra after coming home from work. Before sitting down or relaxing, lie down for ten minutes and unwind. Consciously become aware of the body and the mental states and smooth out all the physical, mental and emotional agitations. After ten minutes of yoga nidra you can enjoy your evening and relax.

Anytime, at work or at home, when you feel tired or stressed out, find a gap of five minutes, close your eyes and practise a short yoga nidra. Just rotate the mind through the different parts of the body. Then practise breath awareness, inhalation and exhalation, after a short time you can combine

the mantra *So Ham*, with breath awareness for a few minutes. To relax the agitated nerves, body and mind, count the breath, but to develop clarity of mind, use the mantra with the breath. This simple practice will give you immense relaxation and the energy to continue for the rest of the day.

The mantra of the breath is *Soham*. With inhalation, the mantra *So* is repeated mentally and with exhalation the mantra *Ham* is repeated. Mantra with breath awareness is a powerful tool to clear the mind of tensions and stress, to develop clarity of thought and the ability to make quick decisions and to be in control of one's mental and inner faculties. This practice should take only five minutes.

Rotate your awareness through the different parts of the body and then use the breath and the mantra to clear the mind. This practice can be done once, twice, thrice or as many times as you wish during the day. It can be staggered across the day, during work or leisure hours. These are investments that you can make in your life. For the first few days it will be a routine practice, but as you become established in the practices, you will find it easier and more comfortable to do them even while working, to achieve total relaxation and clarity of body and mind. Thus, a brief yoga nidra and a brief meditation during the day will help maintain clarity of mind and a stress-free body. The component of yoga nidra and ajapa japa in a five-minute practice becomes your pratyahara practice during the day, as many times as you wish to do it.

Capsule 5 – meditation, before sleeping

The fifth capsule is meditation practice at night before going to sleep. The simplest form of meditation is mantra meditation with breath awareness. Reviewing the events of the day can also be part of the night time meditation. Go through a short analysis of the events of the day to remove the barbs and the arrows that have dented your armour. Go through the events of the day in sequence, from the time you woke up in the morning until the present moment. Look at the events that have occurred and identify situations, times, people or places where you have encountered conflict, stress, aggression and fear.

Just be an objective witness to all that has happened and gradually bring a simple thought to your mind, without reacting to what has happened: “Is there a better way to deal with this situation if it happens again?” and then forget about it. This self-analysis will help you to be better prepared the next time. Within a week of this practice, you will be able to direct your efforts to manage stressful situations in a better way. The mind suddenly becomes aware of its own responses and reactions, and when crisis and confusion arise, suddenly the thought will come, “I am going to manage this in a better way,” and the pressure will dissipate. An improvement in the mental expressions and mental behaviour will be experienced. By observing and recognizing the stressors of the day, you eliminate them so they do not become unconscious seeds. Awareness develops of how to handle stressful situations and release them. When stress can be managed easily, it does not become a memory. When stress becomes a memory, it goes deep and is difficult to remove the intensity of the negativity contained in that stress.

Mantra meditation can also be practised at night. Just before you are ready to go to sleep, practise ten minutes of a short meditation to connect with your inner values, strengths and peace, to put aside all the household and professional problems, to be at peace with yourself. During those ten minutes, there should be no thoughts of family or profession, no problems or tension. Identify neither with your body, its experiences of stiffness and tiredness, nor with the mind or mental experiences. No thought of rejection or pain, pleasure or happiness, promotion or demotion. For ten minutes, you are absolutely you, away from everyone else in the world. Say to yourself, “I am not so and so. I am pure spirit, flawless, undisturbed, at peace with myself, discovering myself.” Isolate yourself from your fears, stresses and anxieties. Isolate yourself from your physical, emotional and mental connections. Just focus on the silence and space within. If you have a mantra, repeat it for one or two malas. Then go to sleep like a baby.

Maintaining the capsules

The five yoga capsules help you to gradually incorporate small yoga routines and disciplines into your lifestyle and to create a positive, uplifting environment at home. Practise the five capsules from Monday to Friday. You will need to spend thirty minutes in the morning, ten minutes in the afternoon and ten minutes in the evening. In twenty-four hours you can devote at least one hour to your development and growth. Divide it into ten minute blocks: Ten minutes meditation at night before going to bed, and ten minutes yoga nidra after work. Whenever you feel tired, exhausted, drained of energy during the day, practise pranayama. Practise asanas for ten minutes in the morning, and the three mantras for ten minutes early in the morning after you wake up.

On weekends, Saturday or Sunday, practise some hatha yoga techniques such as neti, kapalbhati or trataka. Practise meditations such as ajapa japa or antar mouna. On Saturday evening, chant the Mahamrityunjaya mantra one hundred and eight times. If the family does this together once a week, it creates a positive environment and vibration in the home.

The most important capsules of the day are number one and five, the morning mantra and the night time meditation. Mantras will help you to face life with a better frame of mind. Meditation at night will help to improve the quality of sleep, without psychological tensions or subconscious stresses. People with busy lives, obligations and duties will reap immense benefits by applying these yoga capsules. Beyond this if you want to do extracurricular activities in yoga, you are free to do so, and do it with gusto. Do your stretches, body work, mind work, practise other yogas if you have been trained in them, go to classes if you do so regularly, build up yogic awareness, learn about new things that can help you, but maintain these five capsules as much as possible every day of your life and you will eventually win the fight with your stresses and experience a more positive and balanced you.

To regain your strength and stamina, once a year go to an ashram and live there in a simple manner. Change the

environment from home to ashram. Change your attitudes, your work, your routine, your associations, and you will find you are recharging your batteries. Whenever the batteries are flat, recharge them in an ashram. Just one week of ashram living will bring a qualitative change in your lifestyle. You need to have this capsule at least once a year.

Living yoga

If you can maintain this discipline for some years while also following your other interests, you will begin to experience the benefits of yoga in your life. Yoga will become a part of your life and not remain a practice. Then you will be able to move from practice to sadhana. Try to follow the aims set by yoga. Yogic goals are clearly defined: cultivating awareness, disciplining and restructuring the personality, managing the mental and emotional distractions and disturbances, and becoming the observer of one's life and actions. Following the dictates of the mind is yoga practice, following the dictates of yoga is yoga sadhana, and integrating yoga to aid the development of your potentials is living a yogic lifestyle.

Yogic lifestyle is applicable to all of us to improve the quality of life, to improve the efficiency of the mind, to bring about creative performance, to harmonize the emotions and awaken the spirit. Our tradition believes in excelling in what we do, and that is real spiritual life. Realization is a distant reality. Sri Swamiji says that it is not possible to attain realization in one lifetime, because nobody wants to create any change. St Francis of Assisi would never have become St Francis of Assisi without a drastic change in his life. Swami Sivananda would never have become Swami Sivananda until that drastic change came into his life. Swami Satyananda would never have become Swami Satyananda if the change had not come. And Swami Niranjan would not be in front of you if the change had not come. Very few people can bring that kind of change into their lives, but that is what creates a yogic culture.

Hatha yoga or the physical practices of yoga are for the body; raja yoga is more important than hatha yoga and it is

for the mind; bhakti yoga is more important than raja yoga and it is for the heart; karma yoga is more important than bhakti yoga and it is for performance. In our practice of yoga in daily life, we have a little bit of hatha yoga, a little bit of raja yoga, a little bit of bhakti yoga; and a little bit of karma yoga. This is what people need today.

If you are interested in kriya yoga, kundalini yoga and other higher yogas, you have to go to an ashram. However, in order to perfect these higher yogas, you have to change your lifestyle. Until that change comes, there is no benefit in practising kriya yoga or kundalini yoga. The body senses what it requires, the mind senses what it needs, the spirit senses what it needs. There is no use trying to learn the higher yogas out of curiosity when you are never going to practise them. So forget kriya yoga and kundalini yoga, because it is not applicable to the life that you are leading at present. What is applicable to your life is hatha yoga, raja yoga, bhakti yoga and karma yoga, because they deal with your life at present, in society, in the family, and in improving interactions. Higher yogas should only be practised when you are able to disconnect from the influences of society and the world. Therefore, your requirement is four yogas. Perfection in these four yogas will automatically take you to the higher yogas in the course of time.

Bhakti yoga can become a useful tool to help manage dissipated emotions. Just as raja yoga is the yoga of mind management, bhakti yoga is the yoga of emotion management. Emotions are powerful tools that can help either sublimate the gross nature or keep us bound in the gross nature. We can also include a practice of bhakti yoga in our daily yoga routine. The same applies to karma yoga. Cultivate awareness of practising karma yoga, jnana yoga and bhakti yoga. In the office, even while you are working, have the attitude that “I am practising karma yoga, I am practising jnana yoga, which means careful observation, I am practising bhakti yoga, which means focused one-pointed awareness.” Go through the day with these three thoughts in mind.

Become a gardener

One has to become a gardener. We have been given a barren piece of land and through our effort we have to convert it into a beautiful garden. We have to work hard to achieve that. We have to remove the rocks and weeds, cultivate the earth and prepare the soil by adding the necessary nourishment and nutrients. Only then do we plant the seed. Once we have planted the seed, we take care of it. We don't allow animals to dig our spiritual seed. Jealousy, anger, hatred, envy and greed are animals. The negative emotions which disturb us are as powerful as animals and they disturb our peace and harmony. They disturb the seed we are trying to plant. If we plant seeds and rabbits dig them up, what can we do? We may pick up a gun and shoot the rabbits. Can we do the same with our anger, envy, hatred and jealousy? We should be able to shoot them and protect the seed we have planted, look after it until it grows into a tree and can manage itself.

Just as a small child needs care and protection when young and can be free and independent only when grown up, you are all in the early stages of looking after your seed or child. Just as you protect the child from cold, heat, sun and wind, in the same manner protect your spiritual life from sun and wind. Protect it from the positive and the negative and allow it to grow naturally. Through discipline, ensure that the tree grows straight. There may be times when you need to use secateurs to trim the tree. At that time, come to the ashram and we will provide you with secateurs and tell you which branch to lop off, but the protection and nurturing has to be done by you all the time, and one day your efforts will bear fruit. Be the gardener of your life and ensure that all that is beautiful, good and uplifting finds a spot in your garden. Make a sankalpa to become the gardener of your life. We can provide you with the seeds, but you have to look after your garden and be the best gardener. Experience the flowering and beauty of your nature by integrating yoga into your lifestyle and daily routine.

Head, Heart and Hands – Three Aspects of Human Existence

Swami Satyananda taught yoga for the development of the entire human personality. He believed that a human being is the culmination and flowering of the three faculties of head, heart and hands, head representing intelligence, heart representing feelings and emotions, and hands representing the ability to act, to perform.

Many years ago in Rishikesh, Swami Satyananda had a dream in which he saw a big city engulfed in darkness with only few areas lit up. Swami Sivananda told him he was having a glimpse of a human brain. The brain is only partially awakened and the greater part of the brain is dormant. Once the city is fully lit, human life has reached its apex. This example indicates the length of the journey we have to undertake in order to light up the whole brain. We still have to walk through the city and turn on all the light switches.

From material to spiritual

Head, heart and hands are the three master switches. At present we are plugged into the material world. Identification with the senses and the aspirations creates disturbances, confusion and conflict. The sensorial inputs, expectations, attachments and associations divert the mind from its state of harmony. When the mind is directed inwards, we disconnect from outer influences and connect with the inner experience of harmony. That is the beginning of one's spiritual journey.

Yoga is the means to awaken the dormant spiritual nature within. The inner nature is dormant because the mind is active at the level of material and sensorial experience, and our vision is directed outwards. However, there is another level of inner experience in which the energies of the mind are directed and diverted inwards to experience the inner nature, which is uplifting, positive and optimistic.

Before you practise yoga, you have to go through *viyoga*, separation. Before you experience union, you have to go through the process of separation. Separation can take place in our life with wisdom and clarity of mind. Separation and union can be seen in the example of a plug and a wall socket. Imagine there are two electrical sockets on the wall, one representing material life, the other representing spiritual life. The plug represents our life, which is connected to the socket of the world of senses, objects and materialism, and that energy is motivating us and making us live. The current comes through the socket into the plug into the body-mind unit in the form of desires, sensorial participation and involvement. When the current flows into the body, the senses are activated, the mind is focused outwards and we experience attraction and repulsion, pleasure and pain. All these experiences are in relation to sensorial participation with another object. The senses have a way of associating themselves with their immediate environment. That is our material life.

When we want to plug into the spiritual socket, we have to pull our plug out of the material socket to connect it with the other socket. That is yoga. We are so engrossed and involved in the world of senses, desires and expectations that we cannot connect with our inner spiritual nature. Therefore, in ancient times, yoga was seen as a method of renouncing the material and connecting with the spiritual. It is like pulling the plug out of the material socket so there is no connection at all, and then putting it in the spiritual socket to re-establish a different connection.

Yogis, gurus and masters are those people who have pulled their plug out of the material socket and put it in the spiritual socket. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna tells Arjuna that an

enlightened person lives in the world like an ordinary person. The only difference is a change of perception in the way one looks at life, in the way one sets a goal for one's life. In spiritual life we have to be clear about the goal we are following. We can live in the world, totally involved with everything and everyone, yet be detached, without throwing any emotional hooks for others to latch onto. When we are connected to the world, we are subject to the senses and mind, to pleasure and pain. When we are connected to the spiritual socket, we are masters of our senses and mind.

Ninety-nine point nine percent of people in the world are afraid to pull their plug out of the material socket. While keeping their plug hooked into the material socket they want to experience spiritual life. The problem is that if we are travelling in one direction along a road running from north to south, in order to change the direction of the journey we have to turn around and go the other way. This is what we are unable to do; we continue our journey from north to south, hoping we will encounter north in the south as well. That is where we fail in spiritual life.

The socket of attachment

What is the material socket? A plug has three pins, which represent positive, negative and neutral. These three pins can be compared with the three gunas: sattwa, rajas and tamas. The three gunas of our life are connected with the plug of the world, providing us with energy, motivation, ambition and power. This association with the world is the cause of the happiness and frustration, attainment and loss and the feelings associated with them.

When we are connected to this worldly socket, all the expressions of the senses and the mind are externalized. The senses associate with objects and the environment; the mind interacts with the senses, objects and the environment; the emotions interact with mental behaviours, the senses, objects and the environment. There is a passage in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:62) which defines the sensorial association with the world of objects. It says that whenever you are beside an

object, an association is spontaneously and naturally created, *Sangaatsanjaayatekamah* – ‘From association desire is born’.

If you are sitting beside a nice person, you are automatically attracted to that person. If you see a nice flower, you are attracted to it. If the flower was not there, the attraction would not be there. However, because of the close proximity, the senses associate with I, which creates a personal and individual response of attraction, desire and wanting. The proximity of the object gives birth to expectations and desires. If the beautiful person is not beside you, there is no association, attraction or desire, but once the desire comes up, it induces feelings which motivate you to acquire that pleasing object. If you acquire it, you are all right, but if you don't and the craving continues, aggressiveness sets in. You now work to acquire the object that has pleased you. However, sometimes our credit card does not support our desires, and we exceed our limit. Although we have fulfilled a desire, we have overdrawn the money. Then another cycle of working to fill up the loss begins. As soon as the wallet is full again, some other desire comes up and we rush to acquire it.

Life is only a play. As children we have desires and we play with little cars and dolls made of metal and plastic. When we become adults, we still play with the same things, but in a bigger form. We are playing all the time and the association with objects continues all the time from our childhood to our adulthood and to our deathbed. When expectations or desires are not fulfilled, one moves into the grey area of the sensorial mind. There, in the absence or non-fulfilment of a desire, depression or anxiety sets in which further enforces the desire and the need to acquire it. At that point, the desire becomes an obsession, a continuous chattering of the mind. The result is frustration.

At this point, obsessive, compulsive behaviour is seen. This behaviour leads to the development of a deluded mentality, which is not based on reality, but on expectations and ambitions. In the deluded state, clarity of mind does not exist, the component of wisdom is pushed aside and that

strong emotion overpowers one's life. That emotion is related to desire, expectation and ambition. Right now, the mind is following its own direction, the heart is following its own direction and performance is going in a separate direction, and therefore we find our nature and personality is stressed, fractured and dissipated. This happens to everyone because we are all connected to the socket of the material world.

Yoga of head, heart and hands

How can we improve this condition of life? The practice of asana and pranayama will not help to manage or overcome it. What will help is observation of the mind. Sri Swamiji has said many times that a human being is a composition of the qualities of the head, heart and hands. These are the three factors of existence. If you don't have a head, but only heart and hands, you will be unsuccessful. If you don't have a heart, only head and hands, you will be unsuccessful. If you have hands, but no head and heart, you will be unsuccessful. For life to express itself in its totality, head, heart and hands have to be activated and integrated. One mistake modern civilization has made is putting the head before the heart and hands, whereas yoga advises one to look at all three aspects with the same attitude, intensity and awareness.

How can the qualities of head, heart and hands be cultivated? Yoga begins when you begin to work with your head, heart and hands. If you are working with the body, to loosen up, to become more flexible, to stretch, you are influencing the physical states and will feel lightness, vitality and energy. However, you will not be able to access the dimensions of head, heart or hands with the practices of asana, pranayama or even hatha yoga. To access them, different systems of yoga have to be used.

Yoga has to teach both the way to disconnect and the way to connect. One has to objectively analyze one's attitudes, aspirations, behaviours and relationships, free from the influences of selfishness and ambition. One has to live with a commitment to life, with greater understanding and more maturity. Separation from distress and union with the positive,

harmonious self happens when we are able to nurture the qualities of head, heart and hands.

Yogic understanding of the head

How do we deal with the head? By 'head' we mean the mind, not the brain, because in this context the brain has no relevance in yoga. The mind is dealt with through the processes and practices of concentration and meditation. Mind is not consciousness; mind is the external, interactive aspect of consciousness. When consciousness is interacting with the world of senses and sense objects, that is the mind. From the yogic perspective, the mind is divided into four components.

The first component of the mind is *manas*, the process of analysis, reflection, logical and linear thinking. The second component is *buddhi*, intellect, intelligence, understanding of right and wrong, and living according to intellectual concepts or ideas. The third is *chitta*, the subconscious and unconscious memories. The fourth is *ahamkara*, the ego principle, the identity of I – 'I exist', 'I am'. Thus, the four components are manas, the reflective process, buddhi, the intellectual process, chitta, the memory process, and ahamkara, the ego identity. These four constitute the gross mind, which is the mind we use in our day-to-day environment, in our life, to succeed. In the mind the vrittis or different behaviours of the mind can be observed. Therefore, in raja yoga, the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali, the main focus is on mind management.

Systematic development of awareness

In raja yoga, the components of asana and pranayama are very small, each having only one branch. The third and fourth limbs of raja yoga, the yamas and niyamas, are also distinct and separate from the normal mental behaviours. The entire mind unit is explored in the last four limbs: pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. So, in the sequence of raja yoga, behaviour, personal discipline, postures and breathing represent only one limb each in the eightfold path, while the systems of mind management cover four limbs. However, normally, people who meditate do not practise pratyahara or

dharana. They try to jump straight into dhyana and they only end up in the realm of fantasy. Those who try to have good experiences in meditation, who want to see the light, the blue pearl, angels singing and trumpets blowing, don't understand that all this is nothing more than an expression of their mental delusions and fantasies. Meditation is definitely not that.

Developing awareness, internalizing the consciousness and maintaining concentration is the sequence of meditation that needs to be followed. These three principles are taught in pratyahara, the beginning of the meditative process. Cultivating awareness is the first gear of pratyahara. Most people are not aware of their actions, behaviour and thoughts and react without conscious awareness. There are many sounds around us of which we are unaware because our attention is somewhere else. When that attention is directed to acknowledging the existing sounds, it is recognizing the connection of the sense with the sound, and the same applies to touch, sight, vision, smell and taste. Consciousness is wilfully directed to experience the activity of each sense organ. Cultivation of awareness begins with this small step.

Next, a process of internalization takes place. You move into second gear, gradually withdrawing the awareness which is extending outside and bringing it within yourself. You gradually cut off the sensory connections with objects, events and people, with your aspirations, ego and moods, natures and desires. When the senses have no external association of any form, they turn inwards and you move into third gear, which is concentration. The senses which have turned inwards are focused on one point of contemplation. As the dissipated mental energies focus more intensely on the point, concentration increases.

Further development of concentration leads to identification with the object of contemplation. The object of contemplation is held steady in front of the mind and the mind does not waver from it. This is fourth gear. It is the first step into dharana. The first three gears, cultivating awareness, internalizing the senses and focusing the mind on one object of concentration represent the progression of pratyahara.

Only when identification with the idea or the object of contemplation becomes intense, do we move into the state of dharana. *Dharana* means to hold, to retain. It is the fixation of concentration that is retained by the person even in daily routines and life activities. Dharana means a spontaneous flow of awareness focusing on the object of concentration, which does not waver. Just as there is changing of gears in pratyahara, in dharana also there is a changing of gears three times. After that, the actual meditative process begins.

By following the sequence of meditation you will attain inner balance and harmony because the momentum will build up and what is experienced inside will be reflected outside in your behaviour, thoughts and performance. Therefore, don't try to take shortcuts. When you sit for meditation, don't try to dive straight into the meditative, contemplative state. For a minute, become aware of the body. Build up the momentum for meditation by cultivating awareness of the sensory inputs. Extend the awareness outwards through the senses into the world. Recognize and acknowledge them and then withdraw the awareness inwards. Whether your practice is breath awareness with mantra, or thought observation, or another form of meditation, it should follow a sequence of gradual internalization of conscious perceptions; otherwise vital links to aid the meditative process will be missed.

According to yoga, the process of meditation is systematic development of awareness in relation to the mind and mental behaviour. The first system in Sage Patanjali's yoga is pratyahara for mind management. There are different ways of defining pratyahara, the fifth limb of raja yoga.

Unplugging from the material socket

When our plug of life is connected to the material socket, the current flows from the socket to the plug, which is this human personality. The current has already been flowing into the socket on the wall from the mains. The world was there before we were born and will continue to be there after we are gone. Electricity will flow in the socket regardless of who plugs in, but this body-mind unit is powered only when we

connect the plug to the socket. When the current is flowing through the socket into this body-mind unit then, at that time, the world is feeding us. We receive our nourishment, happiness and joy from the world; we experience noise and peace from the world. The world is feeding our senses, mind, intellect and ego. When the world stops feeding us that is *pratyahara*. *Pratyahara* is stopping the material world feeding the senses, stopping the influences of the world affecting this body-mind unit. *Pratyahara* is the first step into mind management.

There are different levels of sensitizing the human nature and mind to experience the relationship between oneself and the world. In the first level of *pratyahara*, awareness is cultivated. In the second stage, stresses have to be removed and the individual should be relaxed. In the third stage, one has to know how much input can be received from the world and when to stop those inputs. In the fourth stage of *pratyahara*, one has to become aware of the natural expressions of the personality and nature. One has to see their strengths and weaknesses objectively. One has to see the ambitions that govern one's life and the needs that are the requirement of one's life. In this stage of *pratyahara*, there is analysis of strength, weakness, ambition and need, since these are the factors that create disturbed mental behaviour. In the fifth stage of *pratyahara*, there is connection with the pristine qualities of life. In the sixth stage of *pratyahara*, there is clearing and cleaning of repressed and suppressed emotions, expectations, ambitions and *samskaras*.

After this, *dharana*, concentration, begins. Here you are learning to focus the forces of the mind and *prana*. It is like tuning a guitar. If you pick up a guitar which has not been played for many days, you have to adjust the tension of all the strings and ensure that they are properly tuned. Tuning the strings is focusing the mental energies and *prana shakti*. *Prana* and mind have to be in harmony in order to experience *dharana*, concentration. When mind and *prana* are balanced, then meditation, *dhyana*, begins. Thus *raja yoga* is the system of managing the qualities of the head.

Practices of pratyahara

In brief, the first practice of pratyahara is *kaya sthairyam*, stillness of the body. The body is still only when the mind is still, and the mind is still only when the body is still. How long can you sit still without moving? That will show you how relaxed and focused your mind is. There is a link between mental behaviour and physical behaviour. Agitation of the mind is reflected in the body. Yoga says that a peaceful mind creates a peaceful body and a peaceful body creates a peaceful mind.

To quieten the mind, Sage Patanjali says that the posture should be comfortable and steady. He has defined *asana* as 'a posture in which you are comfortable and steady for a length of time'. It is a clear indication that he is not advocating stretching exercises for the feel-good factor; rather, he is using *asana* and *pranayama* to access the mind. The first practice to access the mind is *kaya sthairyam*, stillness of body and mind. An interesting experience of *kaya sthairyam* is that when you focus on the stillness of the body, you will encounter the state of silence in the mind. Learning how to be still is the first lesson of pratyahara, not only stopping the movements of the body, but also extending the awareness to each and every part of the body, to each and every experience of the mind.

The second practice of pratyahara is *yoga nidra*, which fulfils two purposes. First it connects us with the body and the mental experiences, which develops self-awareness. The second purpose is relaxation of the body-mind unit. We may think we are aware, but we are not. Many people discover a new body when they start to practise *yoga nidra*. We may use the body, play games, run and sit, but there is no physical awareness, no physical consciousness. With *yoga nidra*, the awareness extends from one point of perception into the whole body; it takes in the whole body. The psychological relaxation, the unconscious and subconscious relaxation helps to release the blocks from the personality.

The third practice of pratyahara is *ajapa japa*, breath awareness and mantra combined with movement of the breath. Breath and mantra together become a powerful tool

of introversion. They help to block the sensory inputs from entering the body-mind unit.

The fourth practice is *antar mouna*, inner silence, in which we observe the behaviour of the mind. After this, pratyahara evolves into other practices as well. However, the first four practices are the most important ones to experience true pratyahara. After completing pratyahara, the state of concentration of dharana develops naturally. It is in pratyahara that the ego manifestations are managed because they are the first barriers in spiritual experience. No matter how deep we go in meditation, the ego always has the upper hand. In our arrogance, expectation and desire, we become so caught up in our attainment that we miss the point, the ego is not subdued.

Foundation of meditation

In the four components of the mind, manas can be balanced, buddhi can be reorganized and chitta can be visualized, but it is difficult to tame ahamkara. That is where meditation or any attempt to transform oneself internally fails. Any failure in spiritual life is always due to the ego, not to lack of effort. Therefore, perfection in pratyahara is essential. It is the only stage where the tools to manage the ego are given.

Many people say they have practised yoga for many years and have had wonderful experiences, but in their practical life with their family and friends they are not able to manage their anxiety, stress, emotions and reactions. They have not attained the ability to manage the emotions or mind. Their responses to anger, fear and insecurities are the same. If the responses haven't changed, there is no benefit from spending thirty years in meditation. Very few people in the world have practised meditation, because nobody has followed the system of meditation. If the system of meditation is followed, managing each component of the mind becomes possible.

Pratyahara is a definite technique to remove the ill effects of the world from the mind, to cultivate inner strength, positivity and optimism. For me, meditation means pratyahara. It does not mean dharana, it does not mean samadhi.

Pratyahara is the foundation of the mind. If the foundation is strong, you can construct a beautiful strong building which will stand for many hundreds of years. If the foundation is not strong, no matter what kind of a building it is, it will fall down one day.

Pratyahara provides the foundation for the mind to develop its own creativity. This mental creativity is seen in wisdom. Wisdom is auspicious and appropriate thinking and behaviour according to the situations and circumstances.

Thus, raja yoga in the area of mind management becomes the most valuable tool to develop the qualities of the head. Mental creativity has to be developed by disciplining the mind and regulating the behaviour of the mind. According to Sage Patanjali, that is the beginning in yoga.

Appropriate thinking, behaviour and action

The final outcome of developing the faculties of head, heart and hands can be defined as appropriateness, doing the right thing at the right time. We are equipped with appropriate thinking and appropriate behaviour. Doing the right thing at the right time always uplifts and takes us to a different level of understanding of ourselves and our efforts. When wrong things happen at the wrong time, there is always a feeling of anxiety, depression, frustration and we begin to identify with the weaknesses of our nature.

Appropriate behaviour is related to the heart, appropriate thinking is related to the head and appropriate action is related to the hands. Initially, in the system of Satyananda Yoga, the aim is to acquire appropriateness, not a good experience or being able to see the light in meditation. When we are looking for something inside, first we have to identify the dark areas that need to be lit up. Therefore, first we have to know ourselves, not in a philosophical sense but in a real sense. We have to explore our own nature and personality; we have to explore our body and our mind.

The Qualities of Head and Heart

When we say the qualities of the head have to be developed, we are talking about yogic methods of managing the mind. The patterns of consciousness which are directed towards the external world have to be changed and directed inwards. Directing the consciousness inwards does not mean negating the external world; it is treading life with awareness. That is the inward journey of an individual. Therefore, we need to know the qualities of the mind that need to be developed in order to come to this point.

DEVELOPING THE QUALITIES OF THE HEAD

Willpower

The first quality of the mind that needs to be developed is willpower, which represents a focused mind, not a dissipated mind. Willpower is the first requirement on the yogic journey. Willpower does not mean assertiveness, but a quality of mind which achieves what it desires. This is the straight flight of the arrow. In this state of mind there are no dissipations; the mental energies are brought together and focused. If you decide that every day you will wake up at a particular time, the mind will wake up sharp at that time. If you decide that from today you will leave one bad habit, from that moment onwards that bad habit has no place in your life, there is no thinking about it and no craving for it later on.

Many people attempt to get rid of their addiction to smoking, alcohol or drugs. Although there is a desire to leave the habit, the hankering continues and there is a struggle between the habit and their aspirations. Often in your life the mind and thoughts keep going back to what has been left behind and you desire it again; this is lack of willpower. Willpower represents a focused mind, a mind which is energized. That is the first attainment of mind management.

Concentration

The second goal is intensity of concentration, which leads to greater creative involvement. Such intensity of concentration can be noticed among software developers, who become so engrossed in what they are doing that they lose track of time. They may sit down at seven at night and when they next look at the clock, it is three in the morning. That kind of involved concentration is rare, but possible.

When you are involved in concentration and work, time has no meaning. When you gossip you forget the time too, but if you have to listen to somebody telling you what to do, even one minute will feel like an hour. In one stage you are involved and in the other stage you are isolated. When you are isolated from your mind and environment, a minute becomes an hour. When you are unified with the mind and environment, hours can seem like minutes. Such intense concentration is the second requirement to cultivate the faculties of the mind.

Wisdom

The third quality that we require is wisdom, applied knowledge. If we know many things, there is knowledge, but it may not be applied in life. We know what is right and what is wrong, but if we have to choose between right and wrong under compulsion, we may choose to do the wrong thing, knowing perfectly well that it is inappropriate.

We encounter many situations in our day-to-day life where we knowingly do the wrong thing. We know that it is not right, but because of the abrasiveness of the human personality we

ignore that understanding and feel guilty and confused about it later. Questions come up: “Why can’t I do the right thing? Why am I motivated in the wrong direction?” I am not referring to human follies, but about what we can cultivate. Wisdom has to be cultivated by putting into practice the knowledge that we have acquired. Applied knowledge is wisdom.

Dispassion

The fourth quality that has to be cultivated is dispassion. Dispassion is non-attachment. We get easily attached to things. A small present that somebody gives us goes into a box and remains there for ten years. A pen that somebody has given us is kept in our desk for years. If somebody asks for that pen, suddenly it will have emotional value attached to it. We will say, “Oh, it was given to me by this fantastic person and I can’t give it to you,” although we have not used it for the last twenty years. Whenever we have to give up something, emotional values make us hold on to it. That is possessiveness and attachment.

Everyone has received a scarf to wear with the sankalpa of peace and prosperity so that your life can be filled with the good wishes of Sri Swamiji. At present everyone is tuning into that frequency of grace, peace, joy and plenty in life, but when this frequency changes, you go back to your regular environment and open your letterbox to find that it is full of bills, a shift will take place in the mind and you will say to yourself, “Okay, yoga aside, now back to life.” At that moment the scarf will have no meaning, you can fold it up and keep it for twenty years. It will serve as a memory, a memento, of an event that you experienced in your life. If there is any attraction to it, maybe sometimes at night when you come home from work, you will take it out, look at it, put it on, walk around and then go to sleep. Twenty years later if somebody says, “It’s beautiful, can I have it?” you will not give it away because of the emotional attachment. That happens with everything in life.

The attachments and associations we develop in the course of life become the cause of conflict and confusion.

Therefore, we have to cultivate *vairagya*, non-attachment, non-possessiveness. Many years ago, when Sri Swamiji came to Swami Sivananda's ashram in Rishikesh, he was given a room. Sri Swamiji decided to remove every piece of furniture from the room and empty it completely. He said to himself, "If I am a sannyasin, why do I require all these things?" He removed the bed and put a dhoti on the floor to lie on. He removed the chair and desk and sat on the floor with his notebook and pens. He removed the cups, plates, spoons, sugar, tea and stove. He started to live like that.

One day, Swami Sivananda was inspecting the ashram and came to Sri Swamiji's room. He looked at the empty room and gave instructions to have five chairs, two tables, ten cups and saucers, spoons, tea, sugar, stove and coffee brought to the room. Sri Swamiji said to Swami Sivananda that there was no need of all those things, but Swami Sivananda said, "They are not for you but for those who need them. Since you are an administrator of the ashram, many people come to see you and some might need tea and coffee, to sit on a chair or other things. Therefore, keep them in your room."

Swami Satyananda has maintained that philosophy of life until today. He says, "I don't own anything. People give me things so that I can give them to those who need them." That has been his philosophy of life, *vairagya*, as simple as that. Having things but not being attached to them or craving them is *vairagya*. Non-attachment and non-possessiveness was the teaching given by Swami Sivananda in a simple sentence: "Keep them; they are not for you, they are for those who need them when they come to you." This sentence opens up a vast vista of the concept of *vairagya*. *Vairagya*, dispassion or non-attachment, has to be cultivated as a quality of mind.

The mind is related to linear, logical and analytical thinking. The mind identifies with intelligence. Intelligence, the logical, linear and rational component of life, is known as the mind. With wisdom, with non-attachment or dispassion, with greater concentration, the creative nature of the mind develops and we move into another dimension, the dimension of the heart.

DEVELOPING THE QUALITIES OF THE HEART

The seat of God-realization

The heart is very much misunderstood in our society. Modern civilization has encouraged the development of the qualities and faculties of the head; emotions are believed to be the weakness of life. This belief is reflected in statements like ‘Boys don’t cry’ or ‘Grown-ups don’t cry’. From the beginning of life, the emotions or heart qualities are repressed, suppressed and not allowed to manifest spontaneously. People have lost the connection with the heart qualities. We look at ourselves and our successes in life as achievements of the IQ.

When we identify with the head for a long time, there develops an awareness of a vacuum, an absence of what nourishes, supports and protects our life. In other words, it is the absence of God from our life. The Upanishads and the Vedas have proclaimed that God lives in the heart. If God lived in the head, it would be possible to experience or attain Him through meditation and samadhi. However, even those who attain samadhi don’t realize God. In a book written about six thousand years ago by Sage Narada, there is a story where Narada is asking God where He lives, and God answers, “I do not live in heaven, nor do I live with the yogis. I live in the hearts of those who remember me.” The Vedas and Upanishads have proclaimed that the experience of God is possible when the heart is awakened. Therefore, the seat of God-realization is the heart, not the head.

Purpose of yoga of the heart

Yoga has a specific purpose and reason for cultivating the qualities of the heart. It is not to experience love, not to experience sympathy, compassion and goodness, but to manage the emotions so that they can help transform our life. Just as the intellect is the outcome of the mind function, emotion is the outcome of the heart function.

‘Energy in motion’ is e-motion. Energy in motion means subtle movement of the vital forces. These energies begin to move when we come in contact with an object. When you see a

bag of money lying on the floor and nobody around to claim it, the feeling of greed will develop. Greed is an emotion, attaching itself to an object. When you look at your children, you feel the emotion of affection. When you confront an adversary, you feel the emotions of animosity, hatred and jealousy. Anger is an emotion, fear is an emotion. When these emotions come up, there is no voluntary control over their manifestation. When something evokes a negative response, we reject it. The outward flowing energies of the personality are the emotions, which cannot be controlled and guided. The only way to manage them is to hold them and direct them inwards.

Emotions are pure, but become coloured when interacting with the sense organs or sense objects, or with ideas and beliefs. Depending on the association of the emotion, a particular type of response is experienced. The only outlet for these emotions to express themselves is through the senses. Emotions are associated with sensory experiences. We look at a beautiful rose and the visual association creates an emotional response of attraction, but a pile of rubbish lying on the road creates an emotional response of rejection. Attraction and repulsion are the sensorial responses of the emotion. When we desire beauty or happiness, we are attracted to those things which bring out that response from within us.

The heart is like a crystal ball, clear, pure and transparent. If you place the crystal ball on a red cloth, you will see the colour red reflected in it, but that does not mean that the ball is red. If you place the crystal ball on a green cloth, the green colour will be reflected in it, but that does not mean that the ball is green. Depending on their proximity, the different colours can be seen in a crystal ball. In the same manner, emotions are evoked when they are in close proximity to an object or idea. They are energies which begin to move and over which there is no voluntary control. We do not understand these emotions, but we identify certain feelings that we enjoy and which we think will fulfil us. There are certain emotions that have come to be accepted universally as good, such as love, compassion, sympathy, friendship, and so on, and we aspire to acquire them, but how?

The mind is too conditioned. The conditioning of the mind directs the vision and desires to that which is physical and gross. Therefore, when we search for love, we look for it outside and believe that the other person can fulfil our requirement of love. However, the other person is also imperfect and is looking for someone to receive love from. So, while person A is expecting love from person B, B is expecting love from A. Both of them have their ambitions, aspirations and limitations, and both are trying to draw energy from each other without giving it back. Therefore, love becomes sensorial love, it becomes sensual love, it becomes a conditioned idea, 'I need love'. We don't know what love is. When there is a search for love, there is a 'fall' in love. There is no rising in love. People say, "I fell in love," but I have never heard anyone say, "I have risen in love," which means that love has always been a failure in life. This may sound like a joke, but it is true.

We look for the heart qualities outside. We look for sympathy, compassion, love, friendship and recognition outside, we look for temporary moments of joy to stimulate our life and we search for happiness and love. Yoga, however, has a different perspective on developing the qualities of the heart. The yoga to develop the heart is bhakti yoga.

Understanding the nine limbs of bhakti yoga

Just as raja yoga is a system of mind management, bhakti yoga is a system of emotion management. Bhakti yoga has been a misunderstood yoga. It is often considered the yoga of devotion, a yoga in which one becomes God-oriented, thinking about God and one's relationship with God. As a result, bhakti yoga has been treated as a part of religious behaviour. These ideas of bhakti are wrong because bhakti yoga is a subject that is as deep and as intense as raja yoga. In raja yoga there are eight limbs, but in bhakti yoga there are nine limbs. It is *navanga yoga*, nine-limbed yoga, not *ashtanga yoga*, eight-limbed yoga. It is an entire process of gradually working with the human nature – transforming it, cultivating it and seeing it flower.

The first limb of bhakti yoga relates to associations, being in the company of those who are uplifting and positive.

During the day you associate with people who are caught up in the vortex of the world, who are moving forward in life to fulfil their ambitions, whose entire consciousness and awareness is channelled outwards. When you try to develop optimism and positivity, you have to associate with people who express those qualities to allow you to develop and nurture a higher way of thinking and expressing.

What kind of people should you associate with and what kind should you avoid. You aspire to be with friends and avoid adversaries, but bhakti yoga has gone one step further in defining what kind of a friend you should associate with – a saintly friend, not a sinner friend. Friends can be both saintly and sinners. There are friends who can encourage you to walk the proper path and there are friends who can encourage you to walk the wrong path. There is a beautiful passage in the *Ramayana* explaining the kind of a friend one should associate with: “The one who takes your heart when he goes away from you.” Upon separation, your friend takes your heart away with him. It is a poetic description, of course, but this association has to be observed because its outcome is the unmasking of your face.

Therefore, the first step of bhakti yoga is auspicious, pious associations, for it will give you a different perspective and support for your aspirations. There will be help and guidance to achieve your aspirations. Through discussions it will be possible to clear away confusions and doubts. The positive and qualitative nature will develop with the right associations and an optimistic outlook will be retained for life.

The second component of bhakti yoga is understanding what is right, cultivating the appropriate relationship with nature and with the divine. It is identification with the beauty and quality of spirit. It is important to cultivate balanced emotions, for then the inputs to our consciousness and mind are always positive, leading to better understanding and growth, changes in attitude and perception.

The third form of bhakti is to become egoless, to be free from the influences of the ego while performing actions and interacting with other people. It is cultivating humility

in life. When one becomes free of the arrogant expressions of the self, the inner qualities of the heart manifest, such as compassion, sensitivity, love, humility, and so on. The positive that is within us develops.

The first three steps of bhakti yoga help to build up positive emotions within. When positive emotions are built up, the conditioned nature can be changed. In this way, the nine stages of bhakti yoga purify the emotions, the heart expression. When one follows the system of bhakti yoga, one becomes truthful to oneself. In our life, all the time, every day, every moment we put on different masks. We are different people when we meet our friends; we are different people when we meet our clients, our students, our peers. We change our hats so many times during the day that we don't even know which is our real nature.

We put on the mask of falseness, the mask of arrogance, the mask of strength although we are weak and may be breaking inside. We like to project ourselves in a way that is appreciated by people. The whole drive in life is appreciation, recognition, friendship and love. This is what society has given to each of us and that is what we look for in society. We look for friendship, recognition and love in our society.

For love, we find ourselves a husband or wife, for friendship we develop a circle of equals and peers, and for recognition we try to excel in what we do. Therefore, recognition comes from work, love from home and friendship from society. These are the three things people crave all their life. However, this search is outside and we are projecting ourselves outside. We are putting on different masks, we are presenting a different self each time, to each person, to each group.

The outcome of bhakti yoga

When ambitions do not dictate the affairs of our life, when personal greed and needs do not dictate our actions, the emotional transformation experienced through bhakti yoga changes the entire life, it transforms the entire consciousness. The outcome of bhakti yoga, perfection in the nine stages of bhakti yoga, has been described by Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

The final outcome of bhakti yoga is not seeing duality, distinction or division between people. With bhakti yoga, we are endowed with friendship, compassion and forgiveness. We transcend the ego expressions and are equipoised in pain and pleasure. These are the qualities that arise from bhakti. Sri Krishna describes the result of having perfected bhakti in the twelfth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

We have not even started to practise and attain the first experience of bhakti yoga, for we have always used bhakti as a method of coming closer to what we believe to be divinity. Bhakti yoga is confused with religious rituals, prayers and chanting, but bhakti is not that. Bhakti is a process of inner psychological change and transformation. The heart is as complex as the mind, if not more!

Redirecting emotions

In the external manifestation of emotions, due to preconceived ideas, we fight against the environment and we block understanding. Managing these subtle energies is the purpose of bhakti yoga. Just as hatred, anger, greed, jealousy, love and compassion are expressed in external interactions, bhakti is expressed in inner interactions. Moods and emotions are evoked in the course of the day and most of the time these emotions, or energies in motion, are being directed outwards. In meditation, when we are able to direct the same emotions inwards to discover inner harmony, peace and joy, then that meditation becomes bhakti yoga. When the natural flow of emotions is diverted inwards, there has to be a point of focus for them. In the external world there are the sense objects to choose from, but what is there inside?

By the word 'heart', I don't mean the physical heart. Just as mind is understood in a broader context, the word 'heart' has to be understood in a broader context. The heart is where our energies manifest. This energy becomes the aura, the electromagnetic field around the physical body. When we are angry the aura is red; when we are depressed the aura is grey; when we are sick the aura is yellow; when we are healthy the aura is green. All these different colours of the aura reflect

the energy which is generated in the heart centre in anahata chakra.

Bhakti means merging, coming together. When all the channels flowing outwards are redirected to experience the inner self, the inward flow of emotions is bhakti. With the perfection of bhakti yoga one is able to transcend the negative and restrictive conditionings of tamas, and actions in the world do not become the cause of mental or emotional blocks or bondage.

Connecting with God and guru

When one redirects the emotions, two things have to become the focus: God and guru. God in the form of energy, in the form of consciousness. 'G' stands for creation or generation, 'O' stands for organization and maintenance, and 'D' stands for destruction, transformation or change. Therefore, the word God defines the aspect of creation and generation, organization and maintenance, and destruction, change and transformation. This is how God is an expression of the cosmic energy in our life, in our body.

Bodies are changing continuously, new cells are being born, old cells are dying. The cells and systems of the body are being maintained, not by our effort, but by some other force. God is active within. He is generating the cells, maintaining them, destroying them. That process of G-O-D is happening inside at all levels. That experience of energy is continuous in our body, but we are not aware of it. It is working and functioning at such a subtle level that there is no conscious awareness of the changes taking place within. The body is the microcosmic representation of the macrocosmic consciousness.

When the emotions are directed to God, we come back to the first stage of bhakti, which is pious association. The second component of bhakti is cultivating appropriate understanding. The third component is to become humble, to become egoless. The fourth component is to use mantras to change, transform or alter the normal behaviour pattern of human expression.

If we work with the entire range, we will find that this connection with God is actually fine-tuning, realigning and adjusting the psychological and emotional behaviours. The strength of God is not seen in a forceful tornado, but in a soft gentle breeze. In the same manner, the experience of God that we have in bhakti yoga is one of peace, joy, auspiciousness, truth and bliss. Therefore, the yogic traditions have defined God as *sat-chit-ananda*, truth-consciousness-bliss. The concept of God has been defined as satyam, shivam, sundaram. *Satyam* means truth, *shivam* means auspiciousness and *sundaram* means beauty.

Becoming natural

From this perspective, we have to discover the truth through the practice of bhakti yoga. That is where unmasking becomes the first attainment in bhakti. Where we begin to remove the masks we have put on and become natural, we become truthful to ourselves and we know that we are truthful to ourselves.

Once a spiritual master participated in an archery contest. Each participant was given a bow and three arrows. The bull's eye was about thirty metres away. When the master's turn came, he was confident. He let the arrow fly, but unfortunately it did not go straight. He picked up the second arrow and carefully checked the air, adjusted his body and cautiously shot the arrow, which only went half way. The third time he picked up the arrow, shot and it went straight to the bull's eye.

One of his disciples asked him to explain his behaviour. The master said, "The first time it was an over-confident person shooting the arrow. An over-confident person thinks he can achieve anything, but always misses the point. Then he becomes under-confident and even after taking all the precautions, he fails. The third one was the natural me."

'Me' here means the natural self, not the over-confident or the under-confident person, but the natural self. This is removing the mask, according to bhakti yoga. When we become natural, when there is no imposed projection of an image, when we are able to guide and control the energies

in motion within us, we are able to cultivate the positive, optimistic and qualitative form of life.

Evoking a state of mind

Mantras are a part of bhakti yoga. They may be used as meditation or chanted. They may be used for healing other people and oneself. In the form of kirtan, mantras can be practised in many ways to evoke a different state of mind and experience through which one can develop unconditional love, develop the qualities of compassion and friendship, stop being dependent on others or on one's own ego and express sentiments freely.

The transformation through bhakti yoga leads to karma yoga. As you transform your nature, you become more aligned with the cosmic energy, and that cosmic energy then guides you. If you want to cross a river, you can't swim straight across, you have to go with the current. If you struggle against the current, you won't go anywhere, but if you simply surrender, the current will carry you. You can use the flow and the strength of that current to go where you wish.

Culmination of bhakti

Swami Sivananda always insisted upon bhakti yoga. He used to say that during kirtan you have to get out of the conditioned mind space and be free. Don't think that you can't sing or you have a bad voice or a cracked throat. Don't be self-conscious because you are the one who has to build that connection with your inner self. Building the inner connection is known as bhakti yoga. The quality of unconditional love, sympathy and oneness develops. Harmony between the extreme poles of pleasure and pain develops, humility and awareness of the transcendental nature in your life develops. This is the culmination of bhakti yoga.

The Qualities of the Hands, Karma Yoga

All good things in life should come to an end, for happiness comes only to balance out pain and suffering. Life is definitely a struggle. Of course, surrounded by so many opportunities and facilities we do not realize what struggle is, but the fact is that a life without struggle is no life, for it is the struggle which makes us search for happiness and freedom. If there was no disease, there would be no medical science. If there was no inclination towards material life, there would be no spiritual science. One is not inclined to eat unless there is hunger, or drink until there is thirst. There is no inclination to be healthy until one is sick and there is no effort or desire to transcend the limited self until we recognize our limitations. Therefore, it is said that joy and happiness come to balance pain, frustration and suffering. If there is excessive joy, suffering will come as a balance. It is here that one has to find one's balance.

Yoga of equanimity

'Harmony is the highest yoga' – *Samatvam yoga uchyate*, was the statement made by Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. *Samatvam* means harmony or balance and *uchyate* means the highest form. The highest form of yoga is acquiring balance and harmony. Each one of us has to discover where we are unbalanced, where the shortcomings of our life are. If there is imbalance in the body, efforts must be made to correct it and regain balance and health. If the mind is disturbed,

efforts must be made to pacify the mind. If the emotions are disturbed, efforts should be made to pacify the agitated emotions.

The body, mind and spirit are integrated with each other. Although for the sake of understanding, we say the mind is located in the head and emotions in the heart, there is no division as such. They are integrated and this can be understood through the symbol of a tree. When we look at a tree, we see the trunk above the ground, the branches and twigs, leaves, flowers and fruits, but we do not see the roots, although we know they exist. The most important part of the tree is not the trunk, branches, leaves, fruits or flowers, but the roots. When we plant a tree, in the early stages we have to nourish it, water it, take care of it, but once the roots are firmly grounded, we do not need to look after the tree, because the roots will look after it. Once the tree grows up, we don't have to worry about the roots any more. We have to look at our life in the same manner.

The trunk of the tree is the physical body; the big branches are the senses; the little branches and twigs represent the desires; the leaves, flowers and fruits represent the different thoughts, achievements and failures in life; and the roots represent the spirit. Just as the roots can't be seen, the spirit can't be seen. What can be seen with the naked eye is the trunk, branches, leaves, flowers and fruits. In the same manner, when we look at ourselves we realize our involvement and participation with the senses and the body, we can understand our mind because the thoughts, ambitions, expectations and desires come up naturally and spontaneously, but we cannot see, experience or feel our spirit, our spiritual nature, for it remains underground.

The experience of the spirit is embedded deep in your consciousness. If you want to see the roots, you have to remove the earth from around the tree, but you cannot keep the roots exposed. If they remain exposed, the tree will eventually die. Therefore, the soil has to be put back over the roots. In the same manner, there are levels of consciousness, subconsciousness and unconsciousness. Underneath the layer

of the subconscious and the unconscious exists the spiritual nature, the spirit. The realization of that spirit or spiritual nature is known as superconscious awareness.

When you want to look at your spirit, you have to remove the soil of conscious, subconscious and unconscious memories, samskaras, karmas and events. Only then can you see the purity of the spirit, which underlies the subconscious and unconscious dimensions. After you have realized the purity of the spirit, you replace the soil and hide it from the outer world. The only difference is that the soil you put back is clean. You can remove the rocks, which are the samskaras and karmas, and you can remove the weeds, which are the *vasanas* or deep-rooted passionate desires. You can give nutrition to the soil; the nutrition is achieved through yoga sadhana. In this way, you create a proper, positive and clean environment around your spirit. When the spirit is being nourished by the purity of the self then life flowers.

To nourish the body, food is needed, and to nourish the spirit, restraint is required. In yoga restraint is known as *sanyam*. Thus, there is food for the body, happiness for the mind and sanyam for the inner spirit. Very few people can experience sanyam or restraint for restraint is normally understood as limitation or blocks on the natural expressions of life. However, sanyam does not mean that. Sanyam means to provide a direction. If you are riding a horse without a bridle, you will not be able to guide the horse and it will take you wherever it wishes to go. However, with a bridle you can control and guide the horse and it will take you to your desired destination. That is the concept of sanyam in yoga, guiding the mind, behaviour, thoughts and philosophy of life to reach your destination. The entire philosophy of yoga is based around this principle.

From practice to behaviour

Bhakti yoga is the means of managing one's emotions, of sublimating the normal emotions into a qualitative expression of human life. Entry into yoga is through hatha yoga. Progression in hatha yoga is marked by the practice of raja yoga. Raja yoga progresses into bhakti yoga and bhakti yoga

then becomes karma yoga. This concept of yoga needs to be understood very clearly. Samadhi is not the ultimate aim of yoga. Rather, there are two systems of yoga, one which is practised and one which is expressed.

Raja yoga, hatha yoga and other yogas are practices in which you need to involve yourself, work with yourself, fine-tune yourself and develop the ability to control and guide the mind. These are practices by which you are able to understand the intricate behaviour of the consciousness, by which you can awaken the dormant energies within you and come to a point of perfect balance in your personality and nature. These yogas represent the personal effort that one puts in to become an enlightened being. Once you have become, then you have to behave.

What is the behaviour of a person who has become enlightened? Arjuna asked Sri Krishna this question, “How does a person who is enlightened live in this world?” Sri Krishna answered by saying, “Just like an ordinary human being.” The enlightened being will have the need to rest, eat, take a bath, go to the toilet; he lives a normal life. The only difference is that instead of connecting with the senses and the material nature of the world, a connection takes place with the inner self, the higher self, and that awareness will ensure that the person stays on track.

Take the example of a mother with a small infant who is just learning to crawl. The mother can't look after the child the whole day long because of her other duties and obligations. When the mother is cooking in the kitchen, the baby is crawling on the floor. The mother is involved in her work, but at the same time one part of her awareness is connected to her child. She can sense and see the situations the child gets into. If the child picks up a knife, the mother will stop whatever she is doing, take the knife, put the child in a safe place and then carry on with her work. In this way, the mother is constantly aware of the child, yet involved in her own activities.

That is how spiritual awareness has to develop. You keep on doing whatever you are doing: working, crying, suffering,

enjoying, dying, living, but have one part of your mind attached to the inner self. There is no lapse of awareness in the connection with the inner self, just like the mother involved in her work is still constantly aware of her child. This was the meaning of Sri Krishna's statement to Arjuna.

You are living a normal life. There is no hypocrisy, no feeling that I have become a saint and an enlightened being and other people have to see me as such. Awareness has to be cultivated. Cultivation of awareness is the outcome of inner purity, harmony and balance. Balance between the swings of happiness and frustration comes with observation, participation and involvement in one's own karmas.

Balance in action

One cannot be without karma; the law of life is karma. The moment there is no karma, life does not exist. We do not have voluntary control over our karmas, but the grace of the karmic principle is that if karmas can bind you, they also have the strength to liberate you. When people think of karma yoga, they just think of work, physical, social or professional. However, the concept of karma as involvement in action is a basic and preliminary concept.

Karma means motion, activity or movement. When you add the word yoga, it represents harmony and balance in performance. When you look at karma yoga from this angle, you try to organize yourself so that your performance, behaviour and actions are properly balanced. Such management of karmas is possible with the right attitude. Karma yoga means learning how to perform actions in the most creative way, so they become the cause of one's experience of freedom, not the cause of further conditioning.

Many years ago, when Sri Swamiji went to Swami Sivananda for sannyyasa, he asked Swami Sivananda, "What is expected of me after I take sannyyasa?" Swami Sivananda said, "Nothing will change. Continue what you have been doing, looking after the kitchen, the office, the publications, the guests, management, the cleaning and the gardening. Continue with the normal life of the ashram." Sri Swamiji

said, “If I have to do the same work, I might as well go back home and do it there, as at least I will look after my family.”

Swami Sivananda said, “You are free to go, but remember the karmas will bind you. Expectations, success and failure will bind you, because the moment you go back to your family and home, you will begin to perform karma with the self-oriented awareness that ‘I am the doer’, with a desire associated with yourself and your near and dear ones. When they become the priority in your life, the selfish, self-oriented nature will develop and become stronger. At that time the karmas will become barriers and create bondage; they will give birth to new expectations and desires, to new ambitions and bind you to the outcome of your actions. There will be no one to tell you what you are doing right and what you are doing wrong. If you do the same work in the ashram, in the presence of the guru, there will be a natural feeling that you are not working for yourself or your family. You will be free from the conditionings of the karma. Whatever you do is an offering to your guru’s work or God. Then success and failure will have no relevance in your life because if what you do is successful, it is being dedicated to God and guru, and if it is unsuccessful, you still dedicate it to God and guru.

“When you dedicate your actions in that manner, you are free from the desire of the results. Just try to do your work with the best intentions and with utmost creativity, and you will be free from the attachment of karmas. When you are able to find the balance between perfection and imperfection, between the performance of karma and personal expectations, when you are able to let go of your association with desire or the result of karma, karma will not bind you. It will liberate you.”

This was the practical teaching in karma yoga that Swami Sivananda gave Swami Satyananda. Of course, the theory has been mentioned in different literatures and scriptures. The *Bhagavad Gita* mentions that one must perform karma without any expectations, but with perfection. You read it and say, “What a wonderful idea!” However, to apply it in life becomes difficult for you have always been trained to work

for yourself, for your advancement and success in life. Right from early childhood you are told that through performance and actions you will get good results, therefore, aspire for good results. You are told to work for gain and not to involve yourself where there is no gain. It is a social understanding that the more you gain the more successful you are, and the more you lose the more unsuccessful you are.

It is difficult for people to manage their performance or karmas. The karma which we perform through the senses creates a reflection in the mind. That reflection becomes a seed internally in which we find the growth of either selfishness or selflessness. In the *Bhagavad Gita* it is said that actions will give three kinds of results: happiness, suffering and a mixed result. When we perform karmas with the attitude of self-oriented gain, the result of the karmas is generally negative. The *Bhagavad Gita* states, “Be equipoised and balanced in the perfect outcome and the imperfect outcome of action.” The more you try to work without the mind putting its selfish colours on karma, the freer you become.

The shadow of a yogi

There is a story of a sadhaka who practised intense austerities for many years to have the vision of God. At the end, God was pleased and he appeared before the aspirant and said, “I am here. You can ask for anything you want.” The man said, “I have nothing to ask. I did my sadhana, my austerities, so that I could have your darshan. Now that I have seen you, I will go.” God said, “I have already made a commitment to give you a boon. Ask me for something.” The sadhaka said, “I practised austerities only to have your darshan, not to ask something of you.”

God tried one last time, but the aspirant turned around and walked away, saying, “God who is supposed to be omnipotent and omniscient should recognize that I have no expectation or desire in my heart, yet he keeps saying, ask, ask, ask.” As God watched the man walk away, he suddenly noticed the man’s shadow and he blessed the shadow with the power of healing.

The sadhaka did not know that he had received this blessing. As he continued walking, his shadow worked wonders behind him. The shadow fell on a blind person who gained his sight, on a lame man who began to walk, on a dead person who came back to life. The sadhaka totally oblivious to the power of his shadow continued to work wonders and miracles.

Most people would have asked God to bless them and their family members. Demands come when we identify with ourselves. Self-identification is one of the biggest follies in spiritual life. Arrogance takes one away from one's real nature, whereas, humility brings one closer to one's own internal divine nature, and one does good without knowing it. A flower does not know that it is spreading beauty and fragrance to others. A flower cannot see its own beauty or smell its own fragrance. That is how a perfect being has to be, an enlightened being has to be, a sadhaka has to be. The fragrance and beauty emanate naturally and spontaneously without your knowing. If you know it is happening, then definitely ego and arrogance will take root.

In history there are many examples of people who have walked the free path and brought joy and happiness into the lives of many. If you look at the lives of saints in all the traditions and religions of the world, the characteristic of saintliness is selflessness, not selfishness. In selflessness one becomes free from the binding effects and bondage of karmas, samskaras, performance and attitudes.

Maximum creativity, nil boredom

How can we practise karma yoga, or yoga in karma, in our daily life? Every morning when you wake up, think one thought: "In whatever I do today, I shall strive to put all my creativity in it." Whether you are an engineer, doctor, gardener, builder, housewife or professional person, whatever your area of involvement, you should strive to give it one hundred percent, as if that action is the first and the last you will ever perform in your life.

When I first came to the ashram in 1964, every morning we had to sweep the ashram with brooms. I was only a small

kid at the time and after one month of cleaning, I asked Sri Swamiji, “Can I do something different to cleaning all the time?” He did not say no, but he gave me a hint. He said, “You might be tired of cleaning your own room every morning, but every day while doing it think it is a new room and you are cleaning it for the first time in your life.” Since that day, I have had absolutely no aversion to any kind of job. I never get bored for that statement has remained with me.

Many people who come to the ashram ask if I am tired of doing the same thing over and over again. I tell them that this thought never enters my mind because the hint that Sri Swamiji gave me indicated that there is newness in every moment of life and one can identify with that newness. Before that, when I used to clean my room, I would just give a cursory sweep and finish quickly, but afterwards, I realized that I was looking at every square inch of the room, ensuring that it was clean and free from dirt. That one sentence of Sri Swamiji’s changed my entire attitude and viewpoint with respect to work.

Later I found that the same idea was transferred to other activities as well. Often when I look at people I have known for a long time, I see them as if for the first time. It has become a habit, a part of my nature. That is the starting point for karma yoga. With this idea you can move into the path of karma yoga where actions do not become a burden, but instead a way to free yourself from preconditioned ideas.

Back to basics

The second important point is never to consider yourself an expert or master in what you do, but always remember to begin with the basics. Just stay with the basics to develop this awareness and understanding. If you are an artist, be more aware of your effort on the canvas. If you are a doctor, connect more with your patients. Connecting more doesn’t mean that you fall all over the patient, but try to understand the need of the person and help that particular condition. If you are a chef, give a hundred percent to your cooking and ensure that every meal is the best meal you have ever produced. If

a failure comes, smile, don't frown, for failures will indicate your shortcomings, weaknesses and limitations. If success comes, ignore it.

Failures are milestones on the path of creativity. If you can observe those failures, you will know how far you have travelled on the path of karma yoga. Ignore the success because a task is bound to be successful if you do it in the right manner and with the right attitude. Focus on creativity, on acquiring balance between success and failure. Finding balance between success and failure is the first level of understanding of human performance. The idea of success and failure is self-oriented, but when there is an understanding that 'I am performing actions to develop my own creativity without any expectation', then one becomes free internally.

Adopting a new attitude

Once a man came to me in a depressed state. He was about sixty-five and had lived a good life. He had had a high position in a firm and moved into a beautiful house when he retired. After three months of retirement, suddenly there was a fire in the house and he lost everything. As a result he was totally disturbed and depressed. He came to me to ask for help on how to manage himself. After listening to his problems, I told him that suffering and brooding over the past would not bring it back, so instead he should think of the future and strive to make it brighter.

He was in such a distressed state that he did not really pay any heed. However, as he was walking through the gardens, a few children were playing there with toys, dolls and cars. The children had a scuffle in which a doll's arm was broken and a little girl started to cry. The man went up to the girl, patted her on the head and said, "Don't cry. It's only a doll; you can get another one, a better one."

I was walking behind him and said, "Why don't you apply this philosophy to yourself?" He looked at me in surprise, became quiet and left. A month later, he came back and said, "Swamiji, I don't know what happened to me that day.

You told me something, but I did not accept it. When you made me aware of what I had said to the little girl, I suddenly realized my mistake. I still feel the loss, but it is not making me depressed any more. I am starting to rebuild my life again.” Attitude is an important component of life because with the right attitude one can do wonders; one can be happy, positive and optimistic. With the wrong attitude, one will go down the drain.

There was a man who came to the ashram suffering from hypertension. I asked when he first became aware of it. Was it work-related stress, personal dissatisfaction, a family situation? He described a situation where he was sitting at home watching television. His daughter-in-law was cleaning the house. She was feeling frustrated, angry and anxious because she had had a fight with her husband. When she saw her father-in-law, she commented that he was as lazy as a dog. That remark went straight to his heart like a bullet and his blood pressure went up.

I asked him what image came into his mind when he heard the remark. He said, “A scrawny street dog, flea-ridden and limping.” That identification with a street dog was the cause of his high blood pressure, not the daughter-in-law’s remark. I told him to visualize himself as a beautiful pedigree dog, living in luxury. Six weeks later he told me that his hypertension had gone. He said, “Every night before going to sleep I visualized myself as a very lucky dog.” That was the solution.

Building immunity to negative influences

What does the above incident indicate? Is this yoga? Or is it only a way of looking at ourselves in a different manner? A person reacts to a word, a situation or circumstance without awareness or understanding of himself or his daughter-in-law’s mental state, but the moment he began to develop awareness and to analyze the situation, he changed his mental image into a positive one. If you call me a dog and I react, I am looking at myself from a particular angle. If you call me a dog and I think to myself, “Only a dog can recognize another one,” the problem is yours, not mine.

When you accept reactions, there is suffering, but when you observe the reactions, there is tranquillity. You are able to release a negative impression and remain connected with internal harmony. Therefore, the attitude has to be modified to ensure that our actions do not create a negative impression. In this way, we build up immunity to the negative influences of actions. Once we are immune to negative influences, our actions become creative. This is the concept of karma yoga – not what you do outside, but how you deal with the situation inside.

It is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* that your job is only to act, not to identify with the action. In a movie the actors play their roles and express all kinds of emotions, so much so that other people become intensely affected. If we see a love scene on the screen we melt inside; if we see a violent scene we feel the corresponding emotion; if we see a compassionate scene tears begin to flow, but for the actor it is only an act. The actor may be crying on the screen, but inside he or she will know that it is only an act and the story of the movie is not going to change the life of the real person.

The same thought is expressed in the *Bhagavad Gita*, “Perform your duty diligently, but don’t identify with that action, don’t identify with the outcome whether positive or negative, just focus on being creative.” After completing the action, know that you have given a hundred percent and sleep in peace. The next day again give your hundred percent and the day after another hundred percent. Every day of your life give your hundred percent and be free from the effects of actions. Don’t associate the idea of pleasure or suffering with actions, but find the balance. Here we come back to the statement referred to earlier, ‘Harmony or balance is the highest form of yoga’.

Surrender to the divine will

In nature everything lives for the benefit of others. Trees give fruit for the pleasure of others, flowers give fragrance for the pleasure of others, rivers give water for the happiness of others, the sun gives warmth for the happiness of

others. Humankind is the only species which lives for its own happiness without any consideration for the needs or aspirations of others. Therefore, all the karmas we perform in our lives bind us to our selfish nature. As we feed our selfish nature more and more by searching for pleasure, we bind ourselves more and more with the invisible rope of self-oriented actions. This is known as karmic bondage.

At one point personal performance and the divine will have to come together. When personal performance identifies with the divine will, surrender happens naturally. Take the example of the farmer. Through intense, hard work he prepares the fields by ploughing, planting seeds and caring for them. After that his personal effort is finished. What happens after that is divine will. If there is a snowfall and the crops are destroyed, what can the farmer do? He has to try again. If the environment is right, the crops will grow in abundance. When the farmer is dependent on nature and the divine will he has surrendered the results of his actions. He only hopes for the crop to be abundant. That is the principle of karma yoga.

Balanced growth of head, heart and hands

With raja yoga, bhakti yoga and karma yoga you are able to manage the performance and expression of the qualities of head, heart and hands. Adopting this routine will make you live a yogic lifestyle. Therefore, perform your duties with dignity, awareness and personal observation. There is nothing higher or lower; there is no work more important than another; it is your participation which is the most important factor. The participation has to be with a positive, optimistic outlook and with an understanding of your selfless nature.

Often one is selfless without realizing it. After all, why do you go to work? For the cheque that you receive at the end of the month? That is your focus and you think that is your money. How much of that money do you use for yourself? You have a share in the money you earn, along with your children and your family. If you earn a thousand euros a month, how much do you actually use for yourself and how much is for

other people's requirements? Therefore, even in normal life, although your attitude is selfish, the environment or situations require selflessness; the money earned is inevitably distributed. You are selfless, but you don't know that for you identify with the selfish quality. It is this attitude which has to be adjusted in karma yoga.

Raja yoga and hatha yoga represent the personal effort to transform yourself, whereas bhakti yoga and karma yoga represent the yoga through which you can express the better you. This expression of the better you is the balanced growth of the qualities of head, heart and hands. That has to be the purpose of yoga which is relevant to your life at present. For spiritual realization, we will meet again in the next life. Right now, let us take the first step in this life.

From Tamas to Sattwa

Spiritual life represents personal growth, transformation of negative human qualities into positive qualities. Spiritual life means connecting with and cultivating the positive virtues within. In this way the mind and consciousness evolve. Yoga is the means by which we can attempt to awaken our dormant spiritual nature. It is dormant for the mind is active at the level of material and sensorial experience. The mind realizes and experiences the world through the senses and the external nature. When we are interacting with the senses and the objects of the world, our vision is directed outwards. However, there is another level of experience, inner experience, in which the mind is made to direct its energies inwards. When the mind is diverted inwards to experience the inner nature, one encounters the qualities, *gunas*, the nature which is uplifting, positive and optimistic.

When the mind is directed outwards, it is subject to stress and tension, anxiety and frustration. The sensorial inputs, expectations, attachments and association with objects divert the mind from its state of harmony. In the absence of personal harmony, there is disturbance, confusion, conflict and no experience of peace. When the mind is directed inwards, one is disconnecting oneself from the outer influences and connecting with the inner experience of harmony, the state of peace. That is the beginning of one's spiritual journey in life.

The purpose of yoga

Yoga is the method to come to this point of inner realization. It can be understood in two forms. The first part of yoga is perfecting and fine-tuning oneself. The second part of yoga is expressing what one has realized, experienced and gained. Therefore, in our tradition, we see the realization or perfection of yoga in four stages: yoga practice, yoga sadhana, yogic lifestyle and yogic culture. Yoga practice is short term, yoga sadhana is following the aims of yoga, yoga lifestyle is living yogic attitudes and yoga culture is expressing the positive self. Most people are still at the level of practice. Swami Sivananda defined this approach to yoga and Swami Satyananda developed it further.

In the last fifty years there has been a global acceptance of yoga. Today, there are yoga centres in Islamic countries, in the Christian world, in the Buddhist world, in the Hindu world. The teaching of yoga is still superficial as most people have not moved from yoga practice to sadhana. It takes about fifty years for understanding and transformation to take place in human society. It has taken two generations to understand that yoga is not only a physical practice but also a mental discipline, and it will take another fifty years for people to realize that now they need to stop flirting with their body, mind and needs and focus on transforming their inner self. Then we shall move into yoga sadhana. When four generations have been exposed to yoga, yoga will become a lifestyle. It will happen in this manner and in about two hundred years, we will come to the final point of yoga.

Swami Satyananda has said many times, “I do not desire liberation, God-realization or freedom from existence. I do not desire enlightenment. The only desire which motivates and inspires me is to help people discover their own peace and prosperity. I pray to God that I may die quickly so I can be reborn quickly. When I am reborn, it will again be with the sankalpa to continue helping people. It is my sankalpa to help wipe away the suffering and tears that appear in human life. God willing, I want to keep coming back, as many times

as possible, to ensure that I am able to wipe away the tears and suffering from people's lives."

This is the teaching and sankalpa of my guru. Can I desire anything beyond this? No, the same desire is there, to come back again and again and again throughout eternity to continue to wipe away tears and bring smiles. No God-realization for this renunciate, only hard work. Without that, nothing can be attained in life. You know that you have fulfilled the destiny of life when you are able to bring joy into other people's lives. For this reason, spiritual realization, God-realization or self-realization has no value in a person's life today. It is like a blind person aspiring to see the sun when his real need is to have eyes and vision, so that he can see not only the sun but the entire creation in its full glory.

We may have expectations of spiritual life, but it is not our need. If we want to be spiritual in order to have breakfast with God in heaven, that is only an ambition, not the need. The need is to better ourselves. As we become better, we find that we don't have to search for God outside; he manifests inside every individual. In order to make God appear in the life of the individual, the darkness has to be removed, and to remove the darkness you need light. If you can light the candle of inspiration and inspire others to light their candle, it will make this a beautiful bright world where darkness does not exist. That will be the flowering of spirituality in our lives and in our world. That is the inspiration of the ancient masters and the present followers.

We need to reconnect with the positive self and through the positive self to human society. A bird needs two wings to fly. We need two legs to walk. Our spiritual being also requires two supports or wings, one is material life and the other is spiritual life. When both are active in our life, we shall be able to fly. A bird trying to fly with one wing only goes around in circles. If you want to fly straight, you need to use both wings. When we only use one wing to fly and move around in circles, we are caught in samsara, material hypnosis.

Sadhana of swadhyaya

Yoga is the sadhana of *swadhyaya*, knowing the self. *Sadhana* means continuous effort, understanding the self. It means there is a continuous effort by the practitioner to discover their nature. Sadhana and swadhyaya should be the guiding principles for a yoga practitioner. In order to experience and live the sadhana of swadhyaya you have to incorporate the principles which you think about and like into your daily environment. One should also find time to relax. Sadhana does not happen in the absence of relaxation. It can only happen when the mind is relaxed, when the emotions are tranquil, when the body is at peace with itself. Therefore, practise asana, pranayama, yoga, the way you do, but remember that they are only preparatory practices, not the final aim of yoga. The final aim of yoga, through its various systems and branches, is to understand yourself, not only from a spiritual perspective, but from a gross, physical perspective as well. Think of yoga as a sadhana to better your life and yourself, not as a practice for self-gratification or to satisfy a short term need.

Everyone has habits and we all want to change our habits with one stroke of the pen. When the habit is internal, psychological, mental and emotional, it is hard to wipe it out. So what do we do to get rid of this habit? Remove the 'h' and 'a bit' will remain. Then remove the 'a' and 'bit' will remain. Next remove the 'b' and 'it' will remain. Remove the 'T' and 't' will remain. Tea is addictive, so the process of addiction begins again, but this time you can choose what you wish to be addicted to. It is better to be addicted to the joys of life, to have a positive addiction, not a negative one, to have a sattwic addiction, not a tamasic one. Reflect and find out what kind of addiction you have, whether it is tamasic or sattwic. Work with the tamasic one, removing one letter at a time, and cultivate the positive one. Just as material awareness is an addiction, spiritual awareness can also be an addiction. Just as drugs, cigarettes and alcohol are addictions, in the same manner mantra and meditation can also be an addiction. When there is addiction, you can't live without it. So become an addict of yoga.

We have to review our involvement with yoga. Are we in yoga only for a good time? Are we in yoga to become part of the yoga club? Or are we in yoga because we want to discover the qualities inherent in existence? When we put our needs, ambitions and priorities before everything else, that is the selfish nature, narcissism. When we are able to let go of the self-oriented cravings and selfish ambitions and become selfless, we move into a pattern of life where lifestyle and human culture both become one.

Sattwa is living spiritual awareness

Sri Swamiji has stated that the destiny of human life is spiritual awareness. Spiritual awareness is the outcome of a developed, integrated nature. This is what yoga has to mean for us, a process by which we can cultivate our own qualities. Therefore, in meditation the aim should not be higher experience, but the development of inner qualities. We find this in the teachings of Swami Sivananda. Swami Sivananda says that the expression of human qualities begins with serenity, and we are far from serenity in our lives. Situations disturb us. Events and circumstances can disturb us. Relationships and communication can disturb us. The selfish nature becomes disturbed. We lose touch with reality and identify more deeply with selfish qualities. We identify with loss and when we act to replace our sense of loss, our selfish nature again becomes stronger.

Tamas and rajas are the conditions of our life. Spiritual awareness can be experienced when sattwa expresses itself. Yoga is the movement from the tamasic nature to the sattwic nature. If we are living in a closed, tamasic environment with high expectations of greater visions, we live in a world of our own created imaginations and fantasies. We feel that we are becoming sattwic because of our fantasies. This fantasy can be shattered when you observe your patterns of behaviour. Hatred, greed, jealousy and anxiety remain. Many people have been practising meditation for twenty or thirty years, but they have remained in their tamasic shell. Has anybody become sattwic, even one percent or two percent, despite the involvement with yoga?

We have to move from the tamasic state of life into the sattwic state. With the attainment of the sattwic nature, we live spiritual awareness. From the sattwic nature we move to a state of consciousness where we become one with the creation and the creator. We become the medium for the expression of higher energy. Even now the cosmic energy is expressing through us, but we are not aware of it. We think that according to astrology and palmistry we will live for eighty or ninety years. When we sleep at night, we die. Sleep is an experience of death. How do you know that in sleep the spirit doesn't leave the body? Yet it is that divine energy which regulates that pattern of living to death, from living to sleeping and back to living. Many different events happen in our body, mind and emotions which reflect and confirm the existence of a higher life-force directing the life processes. In the same manner, when one develops an awareness of this cosmic force directing the expressions and behaviours in life, one becomes realized.

Yoga has to be seen from a different perspective. First follow the aims set by yoga for your development. Secondly, use yoga to develop the faculties of head, heart and hands to acquire excellence in life. Thirdly, understand yoga as a journey from the tamasic state of existence to the sattwic state of existence, from conditioned to luminous. If we are able to understand these three, yoga becomes a sadhana of life. Yoga is the sadhana of swadhyaya. Not the sadhana of asana, or meditation, but the sadhana of swadhyaya, knowing the self.

What is yoga?

The first definition of yoga is a discipline leading to integration of body, mind and spirit. When we look out at the fields we see trees, the trunk, the branches, the leaves, flowers and fruits, but we cannot see the roots underground. It is the same with our life. We see this body and the senses. This physical body is like the trunk of the tree. The branches, leaves and flowers represent our mental and emotional states, but we are not aware of the roots of life. The roots of our life are the spirit. Through discipline we realize our body nature,

mind nature and spiritual nature. To acquire physical and mental discipline, we practise hatha yoga and raja yoga.

The second definition of yoga is integration of head, heart and hands. Jnana yoga is the technique to develop the head, bhakti yoga is the technique to develop the heart and karma yoga is the medium for developing better performance and creativity.

The third definition of yoga is to develop the witnessing attitude, which means to become aware. In our life there is little awareness, even fewer thoughtful actions and many thoughtless reactions. Most people react, which affects their personality. Their mind and emotions become disturbed and when we are disturbed, illnesses and infirmities develop in our body and mind. There is either acceptance or observance of a reaction. When there is acceptance of reactions there is suffering, but when reactions are observed there is internal harmony. This is what being the *drashta*, witnessing oneself, does.

Hatha yoga and raja yoga are used to develop the body, mind and inner nature, which represent your personal effort to grow in life. After you have had the experience of body, mind and spirit, you move into the second dimension of yoga, where now you express the qualities of head, heart and hands. As you become more involved in the expression of yoga in your life, you become the witness of yourself naturally and spontaneously.

With the attainment of the three aims of yoga, we move away from the negative, restrictive mentality, which we recognize as the tamasic state, towards a more peaceful and enlightened stage, known as the sattwic state. After sattwa has been experienced, we are able to move into the higher practices of yoga, which then have a definite purpose and meaning in our life. What is yoga? Firstly, discipline of body, mind and spirit. Secondly, integration of the faculties of intelligence, emotion and creativity. Thirdly, developing awareness of one's actions, attitudes and relationship with the world. Thus, we move from the tamasic state to a balanced, illuminated state of life.

Training the mind

To acquire these results from yoga, the practices have to be integrated into the daily routine. Generally people go to a yoga class once or twice a week and believe they have done their best for the spirit. Often they go to a yoga class where the emphasis is on body work, but that is only treating the trunk of the tree. A few places do mind work, but yoga teachers don't know what the mind is. They try to acquire higher stages without working through the rest of the mind which lies before the final attainment. In mind work, people do meditation, see the light inside, feel the body to be light, an angel coming from the right side, a light shining from the left side, the darkness of the body and mind goes away and you become a living bulb. That is the meditation that they are taught! Yoga says this is fantasy meditation, because it is trying to acquire or understand something far away as the final result. Therefore, in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, the system of pratyahara is given first. Pratyahara is the method by which we train the conflicting states of mind to become harmonious. It is the beginning of the concentration process.

One goes through many layers of mental experiences, trying to overcome the negative expressions of the personality, the conflicting thoughts, the feelings of insecurity, loss, connecting with the source of inner strength, developing a relaxed state, developing a focused state of mind. Unless you go through this process of self-observation, until you go through the process of fine-tuning your nature, you cannot move into a meditative state. If a radio is not tuned in to the station, the reception is unclear, but when it is tuned to the exact frequency, the voice becomes crystal clear. Think of yourself in the same manner. Which station do you want to connect with? If you want to harmonize your thoughts, you have to tune in to the thought station. If you want to organize and restructure your emotions, tune in to the emotional station. If you want to develop discrimination, thoughtful action, you have to tune in to that point. This is how mental training is developed in life.

In our society a lot of emphasis is given to understanding the body and little emphasis is given to understanding the mind. A wide range of medication is available to treat the physical problems of the body, but who teaches us how to deal with disturbed states of mind? Without overcoming the disturbed states of the mind, when one tries to experience the harmonious, integrated nature within, there are many blocks. Despite many years of practising meditation, there is no change in the external behaviour.

Importance of relaxation

Raja yoga is clear on this subject. It says first learn how to relax. We have forgotten how to relax. Stress and tension keep us tense all the time, and these tensions become psychological, mental, emotional, subconscious and unconscious stressors, with no means of releasing them from the mind. The mind becomes dissipated and we suffer from insomnia, worries and anxieties, loss of self-esteem and increasing confusion. To relax people resort to external things like alcohol, sleeping tablets or tranquillizers. Inability to sleep or relax is the biggest block in a person's life. Therefore, in raja yoga, in the system of pratyahara, the first emphasis is on relaxation.

Swami Satyananda developed a technique to provide relaxation, it is known as yoga nidra. There is a specific sequence to follow in yoga nidra. In the market there are cassettes and CDs of yoga nidra which have been made without experiencing the states of yoga nidra, without even knowing the purpose of yoga nidra. Some CDs have good music in the background, with fantasy visualizations as instructions, feeling light and love and the expansiveness of the nature. Such practices only divert the mind from one identification to another. Unless the proper sequence is followed in yoga nidra, the physical, psychological, subconscious, unconscious disturbances and stresses are not released. The practice of yoga nidra has to be done in the right manner. It follows a sequence of gradually internalizing the awareness. It follows a sequence of cultivating awareness of different states of experience. It

helps to develop the quality of consciousness and mind. This quality is one-pointedness, which is the primary stage leading to concentration.

Practice and expression

Yoga has to be seen from two perspectives: practice and expression. One is a process of attaining excellence and perfection in life, which involves fine-tuning the personality. The second is the expression after having attained experience of the yogic states. Practice and expression are two different components of yoga. Most yoga exponents of the past have identified with practice and written their thesis on practice. Sage Patanjali wrote a thesis on ashtanga yoga, Gheranda and Swatmarama wrote theses on hatha yoga, Narada wrote a thesis on bhakti yoga. Each master wrote a particular thesis according to the need of the time. What they wrote does not reflect the entire philosophy, practice or concept of yoga. Sage Patanjali is not the final authority on yoga because nowhere has he referred to the practices of hatha yoga or jnana yoga. His main focus has been on developing skills to manage the mind, to modify the behaviour patterns, to manage the agitations of the mental experiences. Similarly, Swatmarama or Gheranda in their description of hatha yoga have not touched other components of yoga. Their work is like a dissertation on one subject.

Aim of yoga in broader context

What is the purpose or aim of yoga in a broader context? According to all the systems of hatha yoga, raja yoga and other yogas, we have to work with our nature, our mind and our personality. We have to harmonize the body-mind-spirit unit to experience the creativity of our true nature. What then is the purpose of the broader yoga, which is not hatha yoga, raja yoga or any other branch of yoga?

We have to move from the tamasic state of life to the sattwic state of life. We need to look at the broad definition of yoga in this context. According to the yogic tradition, a human being is endowed with three qualities, sattwa, rajas and

tamas. Sattwa means the harmonious, balanced pure nature, the expansive nature. Rajas represents dynamism, activity, drive and motivation. Tamas is the conditioned nature. The qualities of rajas, sattwa and tamas can be understood in the following way.

You prepare clay from earth, then shape it into a pot, a statue or an object. Once the earth has taken a form it is identified by the name of that form. The image that we make from clay and recognize with a name and form is conditioned. In that conditioning the object has a particular role to play; an earthen pot can become a container and a clay figure can become a statue. The same earth at one point is a container and at another stage it is something different. That is what we call tamas, the created image, the created personality, the created mentality, which governs and guides the thoughts, behaviours and performances in life. Involvement in the process of converting the clay into a shape is rajas. The pure nature of the clay, where it has not yet taken a form but can take any form according to one's choice, is sattwa.

When we are born, our nature is sattwic. Our blackboard is absolutely clean, our book has blank pages, but after being born we expose ourselves to the influences of rajas. The blank pages of our book, of our life, are written on by our parents, the society and culture we grow up in, and they become the conditionings which we express in our life. Religious beliefs often write on the blank pages. That pure mind with which we are born is given an identity. That identity makes us what we are today, a particular mentality, a particular society with which we identify, particular beliefs and ideological systems that we adopt, our way of looking at things in the world. Once the blank pages of our book are written on and we begin to express and live that, we become tamasic, defined, restricted, conditioned and limited.

When Sri Swamiji was asked, "Is it possible to attain self-realization?" he said, "No. There are two levels of experience in human life, the mental and the transcendental. The mind is not transcendental, so how can the non-transcendental mind experience the transcendental quality? You have to work to

convert your non-transcendental mind into a transcendental mind. Once the mind becomes transcendental, it can experience realization and union, but until it becomes transcendental, you have to keep on working to improve the nature and quality of the mind.” This is the aim of yoga in the broader context, the movement from the tamasic, conditioned state of life to the unconditioned state.

Self-oriented awareness and selfless awareness

Another term for the conditioned and the unconditioned is self-oriented awareness and selfless awareness. In self-oriented awareness we live our conditioning. We are influenced by paradigms which guide our mental behaviours, attitudes and relationships. Is it possible to transcend them? We don't know whether we will be able to transcend them or not, because transcendence is too difficult a word to understand, but we can definitely manage them in a better way to develop our own understanding. Understanding happens when we are able to analyze the self-oriented actions and behaviours and the selfless actions and behaviours.

There is a link between the tamasic nature and the self-oriented nature, and between the sattwic nature and the selfless nature. In the broader definition of yoga we move from tamas to sattwa, from conditioned expressions to unconditioned expressions, from self-oriented perceptions to selfless perceptions. How can we achieve this? Will asana help us to move from tamas to sattwa? No. Will pranayama help us to move from the conditioned to the unconditioned nature? No. Will advanced yogas like kriya and kundalini yoga help us to move from the self-oriented nature to the selfless nature? No. All the branches of yoga that we learn and practise give us the skill to manage our life expressions in a better way, and what we derive from practice is expressed through our behaviour.

Karma yoga and bhakti yoga

When we come to living and experiencing yoga, we have to use tools which can help us express the qualities attained

through personal effort. There are two methods to express those qualities in life. The first method is management of one's actions, and the second method is management of one's sentiments, which are the components of karma yoga and bhakti yoga.

In the normal manner our emotions, sentiments and feelings are directed outwards, but when the same emotions are directed inwards to discover inner harmony, peace and joy, the word for that is bhakti. Then the actions in the world do not become the cause of mental or emotional blocks or bondage. Bhakti means to merge, to fuse, to come together. When all the channels flowing outwards are redirected to experience the inner self, the inward flow of emotions and sentiments are known as bhakti. With the perfection of bhakti yoga one is able to transcend the negative, restrictive conditionings of tamas.

Karma yoga means learning how to perform actions in the most creative way, where those actions do not become the cause of further conditioning, but the cause of one's own experience of freedom. In nature everything lives for the benefit of others, but human beings live for their own happiness. As we feed our selfish nature by searching for pleasure, we bind ourselves more and more with the invisible rope of self-oriented actions. This is karmic bondage. The only way to avoid karmic bondage and to become free is to understand that at one point there is coming together of human effort and divine will. When human effort and divine will are parallel to each other, that is karma yoga. When the human effort is considered important and the divine will is not, then a different mentality develops. When personal performance identifies with the divine will, surrender happens naturally.

With the combination of the faculties of head, heart and hands, performance improves, the quality of life, behaviour and thinking improves. With this improvement we attain the aims defined by yoga. We learn how to live a life of awareness, expressing the qualities of intellect and heart in a balanced way. In the broader context of yoga, we move

from the conditioned state to the unconditioned state, from a conditioned, restrictive mode of behaviour, performance and thought, to the creative, expressive and free nature. In yogic terminology this is the movement from tamasic qualities to sattwic qualities. This journey frees us from self-oriented conditionings and makes us selfless. One performs actions with the focus on creativity, with inspiration, with determination, and with feeling, which becomes the expressive nature of yoga. Life becomes an expression of service. We experience oneness with the higher nature, which is not a personal or subjective experience, but a connection with people, with the world, with creation and with God.

Sivananda Yoga

The goal of human life is cultivation of spiritual awareness. That is the journey of life, the evolution through which we are passing. We have evolved from a stone-age cave man to an atomic age modern man, and we have to still continue our journey to become a psychic age spiritual man. Human civilization is like a young person, twenty years old, with many external attractions and identifications. We are hypnotized by technology, by the glamour, comfort and luxuries we see around us. We crave them and they become our need, but we should not be obsessed by them. We have to move forward to find a balance between our needs and our aims. When we know what our needs and aims are and they are in harmony, spiritual awareness develops. In the absence of spiritual awareness, there is only material awareness. The destiny of human beings is to realize their spiritual potential, to cultivate the positive, optimistic and harmonious self.

Without positive, harmonious self-expression, the journey to self-realization cannot be made. In spiritual life, creative expression is the vehicle to realize one's own self. Just by thinking about it, it is not possible to become realized. If it were that simple, the majority of people would be enlightened and free from the painful and pleasure-giving effects of the world, without head trips, heartaches and communication or relationship problems. It has to be understood that positive self-expression leads to realization. We have to direct our efforts in yoga towards the attainment of this self-expression.

The yoga of Patanjali and Sivananda

Sage Patanjali and Swami Sivananda have given definite systems for the development of the human personality. In the *Yoga Sutras*, Sage Patanjali described the method for working with ourselves to transform our restricted, conditioned nature and to experience inner freedom. Sage Patanjali's system represents the effort one makes in sadhana to understand oneself. Swami Sivananda, our paramguru, emphasized self-expression and self-actualization. He defined the eightfold path of self-expression. The yoga of Swami Sivananda begins where the yoga of Sage Patanjali stops. I used to wonder what the final aim of yoga was. In my early days I was involved with the practices and teachings, but there came a point in my life where I began to ask, what do I do now? I saw the answer in the life of our guru, Swami Satyananda. After having attained personal enlightenment, he began to involve himself more with other people. I used to think, is this what I will be doing in the future? What is the purpose, the reason for that involvement? Then I understood the teachings of Swami Sivananda, the yoga of self-expression.

In Swami Sivananda's yoga, the first-stage is *seva*, service. If *seva* comes after *samadhi*, after *dhyana*, what is it? It is again involving oneself in the affairs of other people and the world. What we attain, experience and acquire through our process of sadhana has to be used for the betterment and upliftment of others.

The sequence of Sage Patanjali's yoga begins with the *yamas* and *niyamas*. *Yama* and *niyama* help to regulate the functions of the human personality and nature. After that, come *asana* and *pranayama*, then *pratyahara* and *dharana*, followed by *dhyana* and *samadhi*. From a seed we have become a tree and its fruits come in *samadhi*. Sivananda yoga begins with *seva* and love, they are the first two stages, the first expressions of this yogic journey. The third and fourth stages are giving and purifying. The fifth and sixth stages are becoming good and doing good. The seventh and eighth are meditate and realize. The stages of meditation and realization are the same as the seventh and eighth stages of

Sage Patanjali's yoga, dhyana and samadhi. Sage Patanjali's dhyana and samadhi represent the microcosmic effort, where we experience the flowering within. The meditation and realization of Sivananda yoga is the macrocosmic expression, where we experience oneness with the higher nature, which is not a personal, subjective experience, but a connection with people, with the world, with creation and with God.

If, after attaining realization, one stands before God and says, "I have become enlightened, now I am able to experience you," he will say, "You have been selfish because you desired God-realization, which is only for yourself. By attaining this state you have not helped anyone. You cannot enter the kingdom of heaven because you have only cared for your own emancipation, freedom and realization, not the suffering of any other being around you. Go back to the world and become selfless. Die to live the divine life." The yoga of Sivananda begins with self-expression and self-actualization.

Serve

The first component is service. Service is an extension of one's actions. When we are able to serve others without expectations, it becomes seva. Seva has to be connected with the idea of compassion and love. Love has to be experienced in an expressive unconditional way. From the example of Swami Satyananda it can be seen that unconditional love means giving and involving oneself, and conditioned love is taking, withdrawing and isolating oneself. We are conditioned and therefore the expression of our qualities is also conditioned. We take from other people to fulfil our needs and aspirations. We become happy with what we have received and we isolate ourselves from other people. Taking and isolating ourselves is reflected in relationships too, 'me and mine', not letting go of what I consider mine. Taking and withdrawing, not sharing, is conditioned love.

Giving and involving becomes unconditional love. When we give, we are not taking, not shutting ourselves within four walls, but reaching out to others and helping them grow. As we help others develop, we are involving ourselves in their

journey, encouraging them to be an active participant in the process of growth, inspiring them to transform their restrictive natures.

According to Sri Swamiji, charity is the mother of poverty. From charity, dependence takes birth. If you give a fish to a hungry person, he will expect another fish next time from someone else. He becomes dependent on other people and rather than acting he becomes poor and dependent. Giving is not charity but helping the other person uplift the quality of their life. Giving can happen in any form. In the early 1970s, we conducted a yoga seminar in a mining region in India. The miners were poor people, who would go to a bar and drink after working all day in the mines, then go home, abuse their wife and children and go to sleep. There was little food or clothing in the homes and sickness was evident. Part of the yoga seminar was shankhaprakshalana, which was done by the entire workforce. When we returned after a month, we saw a big change in the lifestyle of the people. After doing shankhaprakshalana, the men had to follow certain dietary rules, including not drinking alcohol for a month because of the sensitivity of the stomach lining. The miners were following that rule, so their health and the family environment had improved. As a result, the families were saving money which was being spent on food, clothes and medical care as well as books, notebooks and pens for the children's education. Their lives had improved.

Yoga can change people's lives. If a positive change improves people's living conditions, that is also a form of giving, a type of service. In this way we can use yoga and our personal attainments to improve other people's quality of life. The concept of service mentioned above is an extension of action. Most human actions are guided by ambitions and needs, otherwise there would be no need to perform action. Ambitions and needs only represent our aspirations to acquire something better in life. How much of the need is real and how much is artificial?

When action is performed to fulfil our needs and ambitions, it is self-oriented, for our own benefit, wellbeing and

happiness. We are happy sitting in our air-conditioned home while fires are raging all around us, content with our ideas of security and safety, status and prosperity, name and fame, and the drive to acquire more. This is the cause of deterioration in the human personality.

When action is not self-oriented but extending outwards towards other people in a selfless way, that selfless action is called *seva*. Generally *seva* is translated as service, but in reality *seva* means connecting with the other person. Connecting with other people happens when the mind and heart are not confused by their own selfish natures, not guided by their own desires and cravings, but have become peaceful, open and free. When the heart and mind become peaceful, open and free, then we become a human being in the real sense. When the qualities that we share as human beings flower, we follow humanness in life, and the religion we follow becomes humanism, which is the expression of the divine nature in human life.

Love

Swami Sivananda used to convey this idea when telling his disciples and students to live the divine life, not the mundane life. When action is directed for the upliftment of others, it carries the emotion of love. This love is universal, not between two people, but the entire world and even unknown people become the object of love.

In 1993 or 94, when Sri Swamiji was performing sadhana in isolation, he had absolutely no contact with anyone. One day he came out of his sadhana, called Swami Satsangi and said, “In a nearby village a house has burned down. The husband has died, the wife and three children are outside under a tree without food or shelter. It is monsoon season, locate that family, provide them with food and shelter immediately.”

How could a person, doing sadhana in isolation know what had happened in a village and describe it in great detail? It took us one week to locate the family, searching in different villages in the surrounding areas, and when we located them

it was exactly how Sri Swamiji had described it. Immediate arrangements were made to provide food and shelter.

Some years later, somebody asked Sri Swamiji, “How do saints or enlightened beings help people when they suffer?” Sri Swamiji said, “A person who is in tune with God remains in tune with God. A person who is suffering sends a prayer to God to help overcome the suffering. The cry of suffering reaches God’s ears and God diverts that prayer to someone who is capable of helping the person in need.” When Sri Swamiji said this, I imagined the cry of that woman’s agony and suffering. God heard her prayer and diverted it to a person who was in tune with God’s energy, who was in a position to help the woman. That is an example of unconditional love, connection with the higher nature.

In unconditional love, everyone is part of the same family. If your child and his friends are in an accident, you are concerned about your child rather than the others. That is the conditioned love and attachment that we live with throughout our life. Attachment and conditioning do not allow us to grow and develop in an unconditional and free manner. Some years ago there was a newspaper report of a person who had an accident and went to hospital. He was bleeding profusely but the hospital and the doctors refused to treat him because he did not have any insurance. One doctor, however, did treat him because it was his duty to help the suffering. Ultimately the doctor had to leave the hospital for breaking the rules. The doctor showed unconditional sympathy, which can be felt and expressed if we have the conviction of humanness. Yoga can be defined as becoming human, connecting with others. This connection takes place through involvement, service and through expressing the unifying power called love.

Give

Then we move through the third stage of Sivananda yoga, which is to give the best of yourself to the world to ensure that you have contributed in the appropriate manner. Giving is not possible until we become unconditional, until we develop

awareness of other people. In the absence of giving there is only accumulation.

There is a story in the Upanishads of a demon, a deva and a human who wanted to ask God how to live a complete and whole life. They heard thunder and believed it was a message from God. The *deva*, divine being, said the instruction was to learn restraint. The demon said the instruction was to be compassionate. The human said the message was to learn to give. The demonical nature spreads suffering and pain, the tamasic vritti, so they need to learn compassion to balance their nature. Divine beings are indulgent, so the message from God was restraint. The nature of human beings is accumulation, so the instruction from God was to give.

The act of giving is *karuna*, which means using your hands to uplift somebody. Karuna is giving with love. It is reaching out to connect with the other person. Giving is reaching out to uplift their spirits, to bring a twinkle to their eyes and a smile to their lips.

Purify

This leads to the fourth step of Swami Sivananda's yoga, which is internal purification. Purification is the natural state of the human personality. Essentially we are pure beings, but when we come into this world, even though we may not be an active participant, dust attaches to our clothes and the clothes look dirty. The Indian poet and saint, Kabir, wrote his last poem when he was dying. He said, "When I was born, I was a pure, clean, white sheet and now, at the moment of death, I have folded that pure, clean, white sheet and returned it to God. I made sure that it did not become dirty." That is the concept of purity – keeping your clothes clean even in a dirty environment.

The lotus takes birth in water and grows in water, but not a single drop of water attaches to it. Yogis have used this image as the symbol of purity. We live in the world, but we are free from the colours of the world. We are born in the mud, in the mire of the lake, we grow through the water, yet the water does not affect our growth and the leaves and flowers

are always dry. That is purity. With this purity a state of mind evolves which is transcendental, free from any kind of craving or desire.

Be good, do good

With the attainment of purity the next step is that human life becomes good. There are no dark spots, only an expression of beauty, which can be expressed even in suffering or happiness. It is the equipoised, harmonious state of living. When in harmony with oneself, with nature and the divine, actions become good. There is no awareness of the actions becoming good because there is no arrogance.

Humility brings one closer to one's own internal divine nature, and one does good without knowing it. A flower does not know that it is spreading fragrance and beauty; it only exists. The flower cannot see its own beauty nor can it smell its own fragrance. That is how a perfect being, an enlightened being has to be, how a sadhaka, an aspirant has to be. The fragrance and beauty emanate naturally and spontaneously without one knowing. If one knows that it is happening, ego and arrogance will find their roots. In history there have been many examples of people who have walked the free path and brought joy and happiness into many people's lives and also of people who have become arrogant and faced a big crash in their life.

Meditate, realize

When one becomes good in all dimensions and expresses goodness and purity, one is connected with the entire nature and humanity. In that state the unified field of consciousness is experienced. At a subtle and transcendental level one unites with the entire universal consciousness. In Swami Sivananda's yoga the process leading to that identification with the universal is known as meditation. Merging with that final state of the transcendental nature is known as realization. These are the potentials and possibilities of human life which we cannot just attain and experience, but also live. This is the progression of yoga, involving

participation of the whole life and the person in the development of the universal nature.

Sri Swamiji has stated that the destiny of the human being is to cultivate spiritual awareness. You can live that destiny and cultivate that spiritual awareness by being careful. The first aim of yoga is acquiring personal discipline, which helps to tune the body-mind-spirit unit. You can only reach out to yourself and to other people when you become disciplined, when you become the master of your actions and reactions.

Let us take a sankalpa today. We may not be able to complete the journey, but we can definitely take a few steps along the road and walk with open hearts and open minds towards the path of integrated evolution. That is the message of yoga, the message of Swami Sivananda and the message of Swami Satyananda.

The Eighteen ITIES of Swami Sivananda

Brittany, France

There are two kinds of yoga. One is the classical yoga which we practise and advance in: asana, pranayama, yama, niyama, pratyahara, dharana, and so on. The other is the yoga of Swami Sivananda, which is the expressive yoga, and its main theme is service. As long as we follow the aims of classical yoga, yoga remains a process to be perfected, but if we follow the yoga of Swami Sivananda, yoga becomes a lifestyle. When our life begins to express yoga, yoga no longer remains a one-hour practice to be done once a day. It becomes an attitude and awareness with which we live twenty-four hours of the day. At this stage, yoga enables us to express greater creativity and participation in the world.

The final outcome of yoga is not isolating ourselves from the world, but involving ourselves more deeply in the affairs of the world, knowing our place in it, our duties, and how we can make a difference in other people's lives. This is what Swami Sivananda called the 'divine life'. As we follow the yoga of Swami Sivananda, the gross nature is transformed. As we become more sattvic, more mature in wisdom and develop greater understanding, there is deeper identification with our environment and the world. It should be clear that yoga is not a path of isolation. We cannot escape to the mountains to experience higher consciousness; we have to escape into the world to realize higher consciousness. It is a question of training ourselves.

Training ourselves means managing our responses and reactions, attitudes, convictions, creativity and performance. Such transformation of a conditioned nature into a flowering nature is the 'divine life' described by Swami Sivananda.

Swami Sivananda said that we may continue with our yogic practices of asana, pranayama and mantra, however, we should also be able to express yoga in our normal environment when we are not performing the practices. For this to happen, the yogic concepts have to be ingrained in our life. After all, a computer will function only according to its programming and software. So, we have to replace the software inside and upgrade the programming of our mind. But where do we find such software? Where do we find a program that allows us to change our computer's performance? That possibility is seen in the 18 ITIES of Swami Sivananda.

1. Serenity

The first ITY is serenity, which is the first change in the software. It has been said that serenity arises when we let go of our mental and emotional reactions. Let us look at it from a different perspective as well. It is known that when we are serene, we are at peace with ourselves. So the question arises, why do we become disturbed? Why can't we maintain peace within ourselves all the time?

Some may say it is the association with and attraction to sense objects that disturbs our serenity, others may say it is desire, and all will have valid reasons for their statements. Serenity is like the body. Some may say that the body is made up of hands, others may say the body has legs, and so on, but they are only referring to parts of the body. The whole body is made up of all these parts put together. In the same manner, serenity is the experience of an integrated personality. Most of us do not have an integrated personality and therefore we are not serene.

We identify with a false idea of ourselves. It is akin to pointing at our image in a mirror and saying, "That's me." How can that person be us? We are not saying, "That is my reflection." We are identifying with that image. We don't see

ourselves, we don't see the real us. We think the appearance is real. We beautify the appearance, and when it looks good, we feel good. We have never worked with the real us as we have always worked with the imaginary us.

There are two areas of experience. One is appearance, the other is reality. We are always identifying and concerned with appearance, not reality. When there is obsession with appearance, or narcissism, there is loss of serenity. That obsession can take the form of desire, expectation, strength or weakness, depending on our responses to situations.

The appearance and the reality are both *satya*, truth, but there is a difference. One *satya* is real and the other *satya* is the apparent real. Unfortunately, we are never able to connect with the real *satya*. The *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali state that we are attracted to pleasure because it gives happiness and we reject pain because it gives suffering. Attraction is association and rejection is disassociation. In Sanskrit, these are known as *raga* and *dvesha*, attraction and repulsion. As long as there is *raga* and *dvesha* we will be caught up in the apparent reality. The moment we are able to detach ourselves, we will discover the true reality. Serenity is finding the true reality and not being caught up in the apparent reality and its reactions. Therefore, in order to live serenity, one has to be free from the mental and emotional responses and reactions.

When we work for ourselves, there is expectation, desire and need; we are affected by success and failure. When we dedicate all our actions to the guru or a higher cause, success and failure do not affect us at all. The anxiety that goes with working for oneself is not there. We are free from the influence of actions. When this happens, we become free from the emotional and mental responses and reactions associated with selfish attitudes. That is serenity.

As we disassociate ourselves more and more from results and expectations, we identify more with our creative nature, with peace within, and we attain serenity. We realize the real, and are not caught up in the web of appearances.

2. Regularity

Regularity is the second ITY and an important point for a spiritual practitioner. It is stated in the *Yoga Sutras* that only through regular and constant practice, and by having faith in our practice, can we build a solid foundation for growth.

Regularity indicates a positive and stable mind. When the mind is unstable, we are irregular. When the mind is left alone to behave like a monkey, irregularity sets in, but when the mind is encouraged to become stable and fixed, regularity arises.

3. Absence of vanity

We are always trying to create an impression. We are never our true natural selves. We express vanity in the simplest as well as the most complicated ways.

There is a story about the Sufi saint, Mulla Nasruddin. Once he participated in an archery contest. He was given three arrows to hit the bull's eye. Mulla picked up one arrow, tweaked it, stood upright and with an overconfident attitude shot it. The arrow went way beyond the target. Mulla now picked up the second arrow. This time, he took aim carefully. The arrow fell down half way from the target. Mulla picked up the third arrow, looked neither left nor right, did not bother about his posture, but simply shot it. The arrow went straight and hit the bull's eye. As Mulla was walking away with his prize, one of his disciples asked him the reason for his peculiar actions. Mulla replied, "When I was shooting the first arrow, I was over-confident and careless; when one is over-confident, it is easy to go astray." The disciple asked, "What about the second time?" Mulla replied, "That was an under-confident person. When there is failure, you lose confidence and fear sets in; you cannot give one hundred percent in that condition. You cannot attain whatever you hope or work for because you are holding back." The disciple asked, "And the third time?" Mulla replied, "That was the natural me."

Can you be the natural you? If you can be the natural you, you have overcome your vanities. But the moment you try to project yourself either as an over-confident or an under-

confident person, you subject yourself to vanities. Humility is the antidote to vanity. If you can become humble in all situations, you will overcome vanity.

4. Sincerity

Sincerity is another important sadhana and attitude to be cultivated. Ask yourself, “Am I sincere with myself?” This is not a superficial question. Sincerity is purity and innocence of heart. When the heart is pure and you are innocent, sincerity expresses itself naturally, for sincerity is an expression of the unconditioned state of existence.

5. Simplicity

Simplicity is getting rid of the unnecessary and complicated pretences in life, and learning to become uncomplicated.

6. Veracity

Veracity is adherence to truth. What truth is has to be discovered by every individual for themselves. I believe that in normal life, truth is diplomacy. Not crooked or political diplomacy, but a diplomacy that arises out of knowing how our words can influence another person’s mind.

Once there was a king who asked an astrologer what the future held for him. The astrologer looked at the king’s birth chart and said, “Your family, your clan and your kingdom will be destroyed. You will die a lonely man.” The king became angry and put the astrologer in jail. He called another astrologer, who read the chart and said, “My king, you will have a long life. You will outlive your friends, family and sons; you will outlive your kingdom too.” The king showered him with gifts.

Both said the same thing. One said it bluntly, the other diplomatically. There is a saying in Sanskrit, *Satyam bruyat priyam bruyat* – speak the truth which is pleasant, and do not speak the unpleasant truth, for although it is the truth, it is unpleasant and will create *himsa*, aggression, violence and shock in the mind of the other person. So, veracity is diplomatic communication.

7. Equanimity

Equanimity is being balanced, even in extreme situations. It is being even-tempered in heat and cold, in happiness and suffering. One who goes through the path with clarity, who is not influenced by the opposites and is unruffled in all situations, is an equanimous person.

8. Fixity

Fixity is being stable and constant, one-pointed. A one-pointed nature is an attitude of mind. It is an attitude of total identification and merger with the object of contemplation.

There is a story in the *Mahabharata* of the Kaurava and Pandava princes learning archery. To test their learning, their guru Dronacharya put them through a test. He fixed a clay bird on top of a tree and said to his students, “You have to hit the eye of that bird.” He called the students one by one and asked them to take aim and describe what they saw. Each one said, “I can see the tree, I can see the leaves, I can see the bird, I can see the clouds . . .” To each of them, Dronacharya said, “Put down your bow and arrow.” He then called Arjuna. When asked to describe what he saw, Arjuna said, “I see the eye of the bird.” That is fixity, one-pointedness. The teacher has given you a goal, a target, and you have to identify with that target.

Yoga gives you an aim and you have to identify with it. If instead you see everything around the aim, your awareness can easily be dissipated and diverted. When you only see the eye, the aim, and you focus on that, the world disappears and only you and the aim remain.

That is the idea of meditation too. In the beginning, three things are involved in meditation. One is you, the practitioner; the other is the process of meditation, and the third is the experience or aim of meditation. All three move together in synchronicity. When one focuses on all three, the process is called *pratyahara*. Then one thing drops. You become so involved in the practice that you lose physical awareness. The practice becomes the vehicle which takes you to the aim; you are aware of the practice and the aim. That

is dharana. When you reach the aim and identify totally with it, that is dhyana, meditation. Fixity here means a focused state of mind.

9. Non-irritability

Non-irritability means not to be annoyed or irritated, but to cultivate patience and tolerance – not just with others, but with ourselves too.

10. Adaptability

If you are sitting in a boat being rocked by big waves, you have to move your body to the movement of the boat. If you sit rigidly, you may tumble over. This is how adaptability, adjustment, has to take place in every situation. There has to be perfect balance in this process.

11. Humility

The key to humility is consideration. When we are able to develop the faculty of consideration, then a natural attitude of respect develops within us, which takes us to humility.

12. Tenacity

Tenacity is holding firmly to one's belief, which means having a clear mind. Normally, we don't hold on to our beliefs, we hold on to a conditioning. The conditioning can be a conviction, but nevertheless it is a conditioning. That is what has to change, so that through a state of expanded awareness, we can discriminate between the appropriate and the inappropriate, and maintain the appropriate belief.

13. Integrity

Integrity is striving to bring together the fractured personality.

14. Nobility

Nobility represents a high, good and refined character.

15. Magnanimity

Magnanimity is generosity and the ability to forgive.

16. Charity

Charity means helping others to overcome their needs.

17. Generosity

Generosity is sharing and making others happy.

18. Purity

Purity is an expression of the true self. It is expressed through appropriate thought, action and behaviour.

Create a new mental program

These are the 18 ITIES of Swami Sivananda which represent a new programming for our mental software, therefore, along with asana and pranayama, the ITIES should also be cultivated.

Work with one ITY per month. Make it a *sankalpa*, a resolution. Every morning say to yourself, “This month I am working on serenity,” and remember the concept of serenity as you go through the day’s routine. At the end of the day, make a note in your spiritual diary: “For how long was I serene today?” and “When did I lose my serenity?” “How many times did I rebel and react?” and “How many times was I able to face the conflicting situation with clarity and peace of mind?” Don’t worry about perfecting the ITY. Even if you are able to take one step in the first month, that’s fine. After eighteen months, you can repeat that ITY again. It is not a practice that you do only once and then put aside. You rotate it continuously, and in each new cycle, there will be a new revelation, a new understanding, a new realization of who you are and how you can manage yourself.

The ITIES are the attempt to fill your life with positive and beautiful qualities. Working with the ITIES involves cultivating positive habits. Do not worry about the negative or bad habits of your life. Accept your negativity, limitations and weaknesses. Whenever you have an encounter with the dark side of your nature, don’t worry about it. Just build up the positive dimension of your nature. Instead of trying

to overcome a bad thing, and saying to yourself, ‘this is bad, this is bad’, cultivate the positive and say ‘this is good, this is good.’ Do not become neurotic about changing a negative habit; just make the effort to cultivate positive habits. When you build up the positive dimension of your nature, you become pure within, which enables you to enter the transcendental experience of life, the divine life. This is the practical teaching that Swami Sivananda has given us.

His teachings are not moral or ethical lessons. Rather, I see them as sutras, as seeds which, when given the right environment to develop in, will eventually grow into a beautiful tree under which you will find shade and coolness away from the heat and grime of the world.

Divine life has been defined in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Arjuna asks Sri Krishna, “What kind of person is dear to you?” Sri Krishna replies, “Yes, there is a special kind of person who is very dear to me. He who is free from malice, who is friendly and compassionate, who has gone beyond the ‘me and I’ identity, who is balanced in joy and sorrow, who is forgiving by nature, who is ever happy, content and united with me in mind, who has subdued the mind and senses and has a firm resolve, focus, direction, that kind of person is dear to me.”

He is indicating a person of evolved character. We have to see whether we qualify according to these conditions. It is no use saying, “I am the son or daughter of God and He loves us all equally.” Sri Krishna is saying, “I definitely like people who listen, who apply their mind and who do the right thing.” It is natural. There are certain conditions and standards that we need to meet within ourselves.

What standard of life do you wish to live? Don’t try to balance everything all the time because it is not possible. Take the example of two boats side by side. One boat is material, the other is spiritual and you are standing with one foot in each. If they drift apart, you get a dunking, so it is better to have both feet in one boat. Regardless of which boat you are in, you need to have the stability of the other boat as well in order to grow in life.

For a spiritual person, stability in material life is important and for a material person, stability in spiritual life is important. We have to find this stability by being in one boat, but also stabilizing the other component of our life experience. That has been the philosophy of Swami Sivananda, which he expressed in a practical form as a continuation of classical yoga. He always inspired and encouraged people to experience the divine, transformative nature in order to become whole in life, in order to become one with all.

My Guru, My Guide

Brittany, France

What can I say about a person whose character I cannot fathom! The only way I can speak about Sri Swamiji is in relation to myself and what I have learned from him. I have definitely had a charmed life because he has been my mentor, my teacher, my guru, my guide, my father and my mother. He has been everything for me in my life. I was born because he willed it, so he created a connection even before my birth.

When I first came to the ashram, I was four years old. At that time the ashram was very small: one hall, one room and one kitchen. All the residents slept in the main sadhana hall. Every morning they picked up their beds and put them on top of the almira's and at night put them back on the floor and sleep. The only separate rooms were Sri Swamiji's small room and the tiny kitchen. We had no money. When people gave donations, we would use it to buy food and other necessary items, and survive. Often donations were hard to come by. We did not have clothes to wear, so the males only wore a loincloth. The ladies had only one dhoti, which they would wrap around themselves. The community at that time consisted of two or three women, three or four men, one child and one guru. The whole movement and the work started in a very humble way.

During that period I received my initial training from Sri Swamiji. As I was only a small child at the time, I had the privilege of sleeping with him in his bed. While I slept, he

would give me yoga nidra and read books, scriptures and mantras to me. I did not know that this was happening, but he was training my subconscious mind. Although I was told that I was educated during yoga nidra, at that time I did not know what it meant. It was Sri Swamiji's consistent and constant guidance which unlocked many closed doors of my consciousness.

When I had to give lectures, the theme and the understanding would come naturally without any prior thought, and I could speak on subjects that I never knew existed. Of course, I know about them today, but at the age of eleven, speaking about bio-feedback without knowing what it was, was an achievement. Sri Swamiji educated me and my psyche in this way. I was the guinea pig for his experiment with yoga nidra and he was the researcher, and I think he has succeeded.

There were other kinds of training too. Sri Swamiji would often wake me up at night when everyone else was asleep and take me into the garden. He would point to the stars and tell me about the different constellations, and after half an hour say, "Now go back to sleep."

In 1971, I went to Europe for the first time. Sri Swamiji was in Kolkata and I was in Munger. Suddenly one afternoon there was a phone call: 'Send Niranjan to Kolkata. He has to go to Europe the day after tomorrow.' The same night I was dispatched from Munger to Kolkata, and given twenty rupees for expenses on the way. It was night time, the train would arrive in the morning and there was nothing I needed. However, for the first time in my life, I had twenty rupees with me. So, how to spend it? I purchased some peanuts and ate them till midnight. The cost would have been about five rupees, which was a lot of money at that time.

The next morning when I got off the train, Sri Swamiji was waiting on the platform, and he said, "Accounts?" So I took out the remaining fifteen rupees and gave them to him. "What happened to the five rupees?" he asked. I said, "Swamiji, I had peanuts." He looked at me and said, "Even though you may have money, learn to live without using it, because it is not given for your use. People give money to

the mission, not for anyone to satisfy their likes or desires. Therefore, you don't have the right to use the money that people have given for the mission on yourself." That was a great learning for me.

It also indicates Sri Swamiji's belief. He lives that philosophy even now. He constantly reminds us that you cannot use the resources of the ashram for your own benefit. People have not given them for your use, but so that you can use them for others. You are only a postman. When the postman delivers the post, he may have a bag filled with envelopes containing money, but he does not use the money, because his job is just to deliver the letters. A sannyasin should have that approach with funds, with resources and with centres.

Today Sri Swamiji tells people, "When you come, don't give me anything for myself. Don't give me flowers or stones or candles or chocolates, but give me items which I can give to people who have nothing, such as a blanket, a pot, a container of something, a dress, a T-shirt, and so on. Whatever is given should be useful for the person who will receive it through me."

This teaching remained with me very strongly. Once I was travelling from South America to Australia and the Air France flight landed in Papeti due to bad weather. We were stuck on the island for three days. The Colombian people had given me a donation to give to Sri Swamiji in Australia. It was in an envelope, about three or four thousand dollars. I had no travelling money, so for three days I sat in the transit lounge, waiting for the next plane, and survived on water only. When I reached Australia and told Sri Swamiji what had happened, he said, "Why didn't you use the money?" I said, "Because of your training. The money is not mine. It has been given for a purpose and I can't use it." I believe he was happy to hear these words.

In the early days of the ashram, I and a few other sannyasin aspirants used to go to the market with a sack and pick up the green leaves from the discarded vegetables, bring them back, cut them up with scissors, remove the rotten bits, and

we would eat that. If we had salt sometimes, it was like a feast. It was in this period that Sri Swamiji nurtured us and taught us, and the little comments he would make have remained imprinted in my mind.

Once he asked me, “What do you want to become?” I said, “Like you.” He replied, “There are only two ways to radiate light, you either become a candle and burn yourself or become a mirror and reflect the light. The choice is yours.” I am still thinking about it. Then, one day, in reply to a question I had asked, he said, “Look, you have to know your mind. There is no noise in the world and there is no peace and silence in the Himalayas. Noise and silence both exist in your mind. If your mind is noisy, you will never find peace in the Himalayas and if your mind is quiet, you will never notice the noise in the world. So don’t think of going to the Himalayas, work on yourself.”

Sri Swamiji would describe even the most complicated yogic concepts to me in simple story form. Once he was giving a lecture on pratyahara. Afterwards I asked him, “Swamiji, what did you say? Can you explain it to me as a story?” Then he told me the story of a king who had four wild horses. Sri Swamiji said he had told this story in his lecture. Of course if he had, I would have remembered it! In his lecture he had used yogic terminology such as pratyahara, dharana, states of mind, but when I asked him, he told me a story.

Once upon a time, a king had four wild horses which he was unable to ride. He issued a proclamation throughout the land, inviting people to try to tame the horses. Whoever succeeded would receive half the kingdom. Many people tried, guided mainly by the rich reward, but nobody was successful. However, one day a young man came who said, ‘I will try to tame your horses. The only condition is that you give the horses to me for one year, at the end of which time I will return them to you.’

A year passed and there was no news. Then one day four beautiful horses approached the palace with the rider astride the first one. The king was happy and asked the young man how he had trained the horses. The young man

said, “After you gave me the horses, I let them run free. When they ran, I would run with them. When they rested, I would do yoga nidra. When they drank water, I would make my cappuccino. When they ate their grass, I would make my roti, dal and sabji. Eventually, they recognized me as the fifth horse. One day I put my hand on their coat. They didn’t like it, but gradually they became used to me touching them. Then one day I put a bridle on them. They didn’t like it, but eventually they became used to it. One day I saddled them. They didn’t like it, but they became used to it. Through this friendship I was able to come close to them and make them obey me.”

After telling this story, Sri Swamiji asked me, “Do you know who those four horses were?” I said, “No.” He said, “Those four horses represent *manas*, the rational mind, *buddhi*, the intellect, *chitta*, memory, and *ahamkara*, ego. These are the four wild horses within us that we have not yet tamed.” He said, “Do you know why we have not been able to tame them?” I said, “No.” “We have not made friends with them. We have all tried to master them, which is why nobody succeeds. People work with their mind not to become friends with it, but to suppress or subjugate it.” Through such stories, Sri Swamiji taught me the entire philosophy of yoga, using simple symbols and examples. In this way he made me grow in life and in yoga.

As far as I am concerned, I am an ordinary person. I don’t know what other people see in me, but I know what I am. If you tell me that I am a dog, I won’t become a dog because you have said it. If you tell me I am brilliant, I won’t become brilliant because you have said it. No matter what people may say about me, I know what I am. I was born in a humble, low income family. So, coming from this ordinary background, I was elevated by the grace of my guru to a point where people love me today. Without guru’s intervention in my life, I would still be an ordinary person.

The only difference is that there is a focus in my life, and there is an idol whom I can emulate. Swami Satyananda had his hero in the form of Swami Sivananda, and I have

my hero in the form of Swami Satyananda. He has loved me, he has made me what I am and he continues to mould me in many undefined ways, even now. At the same time I want to make it clear that he is not at all attached to me. Absolutely not.

His teachings have always made me see the freedom in life. When I first went to the West in 1971 at the age of eleven, his last instructions to me were, “You are going abroad. I will not bind you to sannyasa. If you wish to choose another path, you are always free to do so and you will always have my support and blessings.” What a nice thing to say! He wasn’t binding me to anything, but allowing me to express myself and providing me with opportunities to develop. In this manner, he has actually taken care of me from day one till today, continuously guiding, inspiring and encouraging me. I feel privileged, humbled and fortunate to belong to a tradition which has the inspiration of two great masters, Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda. I am fortunate to be under their shelter.

Ashram Culture

Mangrove Yoga Ashram, Australia

The ashram is an idea, a vision. Living in an ashram helps to fulfil a particular need in the process of our evolution and spiritual journey. Each location, event or situation in life has a purpose. As we progress through the different stages of life, different needs and abilities become predominant and we act according to those needs and the abilities acquired to achieve them. Each room in a house has a different role to play. You don't take a bath in the bedroom or cook in the toilet; you use the area designated for that particular activity.

Our life is also graded in a particular way. In the early stages we go through the process of education and learning, to acquire skills which can get us through life. Our efforts, energies and time are directed to fulfilling that role. Once we graduate, situations change and then instead of learning we apply ourselves to living, trying to find a job, trying to find some stability in personal life, in social life, in family life and in emotional life. All our efforts and energies are directed to finding a way in which we can live free from fears and tensions associated with life. Then comes retirement, the third transition, where we begin to withdraw from the external activities we were involved in and the entire mentality and lifestyle changes again.

In this process we cannot live life when we are learning about life and we do not learn about life when we are living life. Sometimes we gain a lot of inspiration from our past to make the next transition. When the external drives have

gone and we become self-contained, different interests and a different lifestyle have to evolve.

Connecting with the inner self

In ancient times a group of people asked, “Now we have finished our obligations to society and are with ourselves. What can be done to use our creativity and intention to qualitatively transform our lives and to adjust to the different environment?” The concept of the ashram evolved from this point onwards. The ashram is an idea. The literal meaning of the word *ashram* is a place of work, a place where you strive to acquire something different. What kind of work? Each room in a house has a purpose. You sleep in the bedroom. You work in the office where the phone, computer and files are. You eat in the dining room where the table, plates, knives and forks are. There is a special place to fulfil each need.

What is your need when you become aware of yourself? Sannyasins say that when you are aware of the world and your participation in it, striving to reach the apex of social life, then that is involvement in *samsara*, identifying with the world, the senses and the sense objects. When you identify with your inner nature, when you become aware of your needs which are not social or external, that is identified as spiritual.

Spirit has been defined in books as something fuzzy and hazy, something ephemeral that is within each one of us even when we are asleep or awake and which disappears when we die. Once that ephemeral body leaves us, we don't exist anymore. However, spirit is not that. Spirit is a level of consciousness. We are experiencing a level of consciousness at this moment while we are awake and active, through the senses and the mind. We experience a different level of consciousness when we sleep. There the senses, awareness and perceptions are not active; they are in a subtle form. The level of awareness or consciousness changes when we dream. The spirit is absolute consciousness, and therefore the spiritual nature means realizing the absolute consciousness, but to realize the absolute consciousness, we have to realize the absolute energy.

In the ashram we work with energies. In society, from the first day of school until we retire, we work with the mind, with emotions and feelings which have been directed and guided by the mind. Likes and dislikes are guided by the mind. Our conditionings are guided by the mind. The expectations and associations we have cultivated in the form of family, friends and relations have been guided by the mind, by an expectation, by a desire, by a thought. They have been the cause of the vrittis which yoga speaks about.

In society, the mind has become the tool through which we express ourselves and acquire our needs. The heart and the spirit have been subdued. So how do we now pacify the mind and awaken the other aspects of energy within, in the heart and the psychic, the unknown or the still unmanifest. This is where the ashram concept comes into existence.

Connecting with spirit is not isolating oneself from the world, not escaping the conflicts of the mind or the problems and difficulties of life. Rather it is trying to outgrow them, to go beyond them, trying to be more involved with a different attitude and perspective. Therefore, it represents an awakening of all of the different dimensions of the human personality which is found in the lives of people who have made a change in the destiny of humanity. They have been able to connect with the virtuous, positive dimension of their lives, without being subject to the influences of circumstances, ideas and people. Such people have become the luminaries of the world today.

An ashram is a place where you work to connect with your inner self. There is always the chance of things becoming better, and as long as there is the opportunity to improve, evolution does not stop. Evolution is following the chain of opportunities to become better in life. This is the statement by Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Follow the chain of events in life, knowing which role you have to play. On the battlefield be a warrior, at home be a loving parent, in business be a ruthless business person, and within be at peace with yourself. The opportunities provided in the ashram to improve yourself are the components of the ashram environment.

COMPONENTS OF ASHRAM CULTURE

Important components of the ashram culture are mantra, yoga, seva, swadhyaya and discipline.

Mantra

Mantra has always been an integrated part of the ashram environment. Yogis have said that mantra is a powerful tool to sensitize the consciousness and connect with the inner energies of the body, mind, emotions and spirit. Mantra creates the environment conducive to the development of the awakening of a deeper awareness. Mantras are non-physical experiences, non-physical awakenings in consciousness.

In the ashram each day is assigned a set of mantras; for example, Friday is Devi's day, so we chant Devi mantras on that day. Each moment has a particular vibration to which it responds, the day as a whole responds to a particular set of vibrations. When we chant the mantras, whether in the form of meditation, bhajan or kirtan, a corresponding change takes place in the human psyche. In order to experience the effect of the mantra, one has to bypass rationality. Bypassing rationality does not mean that you become insane or behave in a discordant way. It means that you stop analyzing instead you try to be one with the experience for that period and then move back into normal life without dwelling upon what has happened. We chant the mantras of the day to have that experience, so you can connect with the vibrations and energies that surround you and also transform the inner nature.

Yoga

Yoga is an important component of ashram life. Yoga has four categories: practice, sadhana, lifestyle and culture. Yoga practice is fulfilling one's personal needs and aspirations. Yoga sadhana is trying to follow the aims set by the yogic tradition to bring about personal change: discipline, mind management and cultivating the ability to observe. The best aim one can have is excellence in life, which includes the three

components of mind, emotions and actions, head, heart and hands. In today's age the aim of yoga is not samadhi. The need is to find a balance between the external, sensorial and the internal, spiritual life.

The aim set by Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* is to find balance amidst the opposites of life, suffering and happiness, heat and cold, pain and pleasure. Arjuna was not a spiritual aspirant wanting to learn meditation, but a person struggling to survive in the world. We are struggling to survive and find contentment and happiness. Contentment will not come from renouncing everything we have known, but by deepening our understanding of how these things can benefit our development and growth, and by balancing the spiritual nature with the material nature. Once we attain even one of the aims of yoga, yoga becomes a lifestyle. Yoga allowed this connection with the positive and virtuous, and facilitated physical, mental and pranic health, and therefore, it became part of the ashram culture.

We are plugged into the socket of *samsara*, the world, life, the experience of body and mind, sensorial fulfilment. The spiritual traditions have also identified the mind as a sense. Sensorial participation is controlled and governed by intellect or *buddhi*, and that is our world. There is another socket, it is our spiritual experience. Disconnecting from the socket of *samsara* and connecting with the socket of spiritual experience is the beginning of yoga. One cannot be connected to both at the same time.

Your plug has three prongs: *sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas*. In the world, *sattwa* is neutral. *Tamas* and *rajas* are the positive and negative energies. You are connected to this socket for your lifetime, which in infinite time is just a spike in the horizontal line of eternal time. Identification with the world and the senses is the spike. You have to go through it, knowing what your *dharma*s, duties, obligations and commitments are and how to perform them to the best of your ability and creativity. At the same time, you should know when to march forward and when to withdraw. Yoga provides that opportunity to 'stop, revive, survive'.

One component of *buddhi*, intellect, is *viveka*, the discriminative ability. Viveka then leads to *vairagya*, non-attachment, absence of craving. These qualities help us extract our plug from the socket of samsara and connect with the spiritual socket when needed and to again extract from the spiritual socket and connect to samsara when needed. This ability to shift is yogic lifestyle. The beginning of yoga is learning how to disconnect from events, experiences, conditions and situations which create distress and distractions. Disconnection happens naturally without conscious effort.

When you are in sensorial mode, you follow what the senses tell you to aspire for. When you are in spiritual mode, you let that go. There is a change of attitude and mentality. In lifestyle devote ten minutes of the day to your spiritual nature and the rest of the day give to the world. Ten minutes every day is for spiritual awakenings, for your journey inside takes you through different stages of awakenings. When you are involved in the world, the awareness is one-pointed and not comprehensive, but when you go in and the outside distractions are cut off, inner awareness expands. That is awakening. You begin to see other dimensions and aspects of yourself of which you were not aware. The ten minutes you devote to spiritual development is like shutting down the engine and allowing it to cool. When the senses, thoughts and feelings are always externalized, energy is burnt. When the mind becomes still, it retains energy or shakti, which becomes the catalyst for new realizations. You connect with the energy inside you, which is the expression of consciousness. Energy and consciousness are one.

Spirit is a higher level of consciousness, where a much larger area of existence can be seen. As consciousness is elevated more and more, one connects with what psychology calls the collective unconscious, not only with those one associates with. All God-realized people in the world have expressed this level of consciousness in their life. It is a spiritual level of consciousness because the focus is not the individual, but the collective energy underlying the entire

creation. The higher one goes in discovering one's inner nature, the more spiritual one becomes.

The spiritual nature is sattwa. The gross, material nature is tamas. When tamas is predominant, we react from a tamasic viewpoint to everything that happens. Tamas is craving, desiring, conditioning, fixation. In the sensorial world, we are predominantly tamasic. In the sattwic state we make the effort to cultivate positive virtues. We begin to live the yamas and niyamas, which eventually bring about a positive transformation in the personality and nature. Meditation only opens the door. We then move from lifestyle into culture. Yoga culture is adhering to the yamas and niyamas and living them. Yoga is a journey of experiencing the small awakenings and transformations of consciousness. Yoga became part of the ashram culture because it gave people the ability to disconnect from the sensorial socket and to connect with the spiritual socket.

Seva

The third component of ashram culture is seva, participating in life with a selfless attitude. The literal meaning of the word *seva* is 'to be with that', *saha eva*. Seva does not mean service; it means to be with that which is human, compassionate and loving. Seva is connecting with the divine, transcendental nature and expressing that nature in thought, word and deed. One has to let go of the many identities and ideas that one holds close. Surrendering to the divine will and becoming an instrument of that peace is the outcome of seva.

Swami Sivananda said the purpose of seva should be to purify the heart. Purification of the heart comes when the expectations and attachments become more refined, not sensorial, not sensual, not anticipating gain and loss, but when one feels for everyone as one would for oneself. It is a shift in perception from self-oriented to self-expressive. Purifying the emotions through seva improves the qualities of the heart, which are further intensified through bhakti yoga. Seva is developed through karma yoga and purity of heart is developed through bhakti yoga. Both go hand in hand.

There are stages leading to the experience of seva. The medium is action. The whole of creation, life and existence is based on the principle of action and response to action, known as *karma*. No one is free from karma. Action and its outcome is a continuous process leading to evolution. Karma can be directed towards either self-fulfilment, selfish actions, or towards selfless actions. Yogis conceived of balance in life in this way. They believed that finding balance in actions would solve ninety percent of life's problems.

The main thrust of yoga as taught by Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* was to find that balance: *samatvam yogah uchayate*, the highest form of yoga is balance. The highest form of yoga is not Samadhi but attaining balance between the opposites. Opposites are the outcome of action. However, although the possibility of channelling one's efforts and actions in either direction exists, due to the association of the senses and the mind and the environment, all actions tend to be self-oriented.

Self-oriented actions give birth to strife, expectations, desires, possessiveness, attachments and jealousies. They develop into a mental obsession, a personality characteristic, and continue growing. Attachment grows into obsession and insecurity. There is a point when attachment begins and subsequently goes through changes in a positive as well as a negative direction. The changes that occur when a thought, association, desire, expectation or identification matures are all the results of karma. These unseen strings of karma bind and are difficult to overcome. How can we change the direction of our karma without creating an imbalance? This is where the attitudes of karma yoga come into play.

In normal situations, we neither observe nor try to guide our karmas. We follow set performances, karmas, of body and mind. This conditioned creativity has to become unconditional by adopting the attitudes identified in karma yoga. Karma yoga helps to develop immunity to the effects or results of karmas. That is the theory, but how can it be lived? The sannyasa initiation day of Swami Satyananda is a clear example.

When his guru, Swami Sivananda, told him to be ready for sannyasa initiation, Sri Swamiji asked him what was he expected to do after sannyasa. Swami Sivananda said, "Continue to live and act as you have done until now, managing the office, looking after the kitchen, being the secretary of the organization, cleaning the roads and rooms." Sri Swamiji asked, "How long do I have to work?" Swami Sivananda replied, "Until you exhaust your karmas, until you exhaust the desires associated with results, until you are able to treat success and failure with the same smile." Swami Satyananda said, "I could do the same work at home. What is the difference?" Swami Sivananda said, "At home, you will work for yourself. In the ashram you will work with the feeling of dedication to your guru, God and fellow human beings. Whatever you do is being offered to them, and therefore you will not accrue the effects of karma."

That is the secret of managing karma. When a self-oriented karma can be turned into a selfless karma, it becomes seva. When you do something, remember that you are not the enjoyer but are working to achieve excellence, perfection and qualitative expression in your life. That has to be the aim of your action. Whether you are a doctor, draftsman, gardener, stonemason, engineer or a sannyasin, the thought behind every action must be that it should help not one, but many. The action should uplift others, whether they are known to you or are total strangers. Such an action is dedicated to guru and to God.

When we understand that we are only a medium to fulfil a destiny, the first level of surrender comes: I am not the doer. The final commandment of yoga, *ishwara pranidhana*, 'let thy will be done'. *Ishwara pranidhana* is the first stage in transforming self-oriented karma into selfless karma, which leads to purification of emotions. Swami Sivananda, in his practical eightfold path of yoga, has placed service first. He says that connecting with those in need helps to purify oneself. Do not fight your attachments because they are part of you. Reduce your attachments by including more people in the fold of your life.

When you include more people in the fold of your life, you experience the eternal human connection that transcends intellect and goes beyond feelings. You are a part of that unified field known as G-O-D, the source of Generation, Organization and Destruction. That is consciousness, for consciousness creates, sustains and destroys. It is the concept of ishwara pranidhana, leading to purification of the heart, as the perception and awareness has been expanded.

To come to this point, before seva begins, you have to train yourself. How? Pick up the broom and sweep the ashram floor. The first time you may think, "I am being made to work. I did not come here for this. I came here for yoga." However, once you develop a feeling for the ashram, the work begins to turn into seva.

When Swami Satyananda went to Rikhia, we saw this take place. The villagers were total strangers, yet we were mandated to serve them, to fulfill their needs. First it was service. Construct a house, help them find employment and develop skills by which they could stand on their own feet. Then came love, when the young girls and boys of the area would be given the best opportunities. Then came give. With serve, love and give comes purification of intention, emotion, spirit, ideas, thoughts and a connection that enables one to become good, the fifth stage of Swami Sivananda's yoga.

In different cities in India I now see people living the spirit of Sivananda Math or Sivananda yoga. People are being taught to live like that as a samskara, as a direction, in which to evolve and grow and to contribute to the betterment of this garden which we are all working very hard to improve. Using actions and awareness of actions to change the attitude, the level of consciousness and understanding and to sensitize the emotions to connect with others eventually leads to seva.

Seva is a state of participation in life with a higher level of consciousness. It is not easy to come by because the ego plays tricks. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (18:61), Sri Krishna tells Arjuna that in order to be a real human being, one should

see everybody with the same eyes, *Ishwara sarvabhootaanaam hriddeshe'rajuna tishthati*. Nobody is superior or inferior. See them as emanations of that spirit and therefore as a complete being all the time. You can identify with them physically as small or large, socially as your friends or family, but in the heart of your heart see them as independent units living their own destiny. You are there to help, support and encourage them to live their destiny. Be endowed with compassion, *maitra karuna eva cha*. When in association with people around you, be without any selfish motive and free from ego expressions, *nirmamo nirahankaara*. Be happy when there is comfort and pleasure and also when there is discomfort and suffering. Sri Krishna identifies the qualities of one who lives in the world, but is not bound by the trappings of the world. It may sound difficult or philosophical, but in reality it is not.

Begin where you are by observing your karma and participating wholeheartedly by putting your creative nature into it. In the ashram you are exposed to many different situations such as cleaning, administration, kitchen work, where you know you are not the gainer, yet you try to express your efficiency and creativity, to become one with what you are doing, not through the ego, but recognizing the tasks as actions that simply have to be done. Instead of ego confrontation, why not a gentle acceptance of the situation by being a part of it? One has to be like a surfer, recognizing the waves one can ride and the ones to avoid.

In the practice of karma yoga, actions should be performed with utmost perfection, without any expectation and with total participation. By incorporating these three ideas in any activity that you undertake, you will find greater happiness, peace and enjoyment. You will discover your creative nature and activities will no longer remain mechanical or routine. Every moment will become one of learning and adjusting the spikes of the mind. Life becomes a sadhana. One becomes pure, free from desires and ego influences, but not from commitments. Actions become seva. You identify with your higher nature. You become a medium of expressing God's grace and will.

Seva is the culmination of having perfected karma yoga. It is the outcome of a state where you are able to perform karma yoga with three ideas: perfection, participation and no expectation. Ishwara pranidhana will happen automatically. When there is no expectation, you let go and surrender comes. When there is total participation, one-pointedness comes. When you are striving for perfection, trying to do the best you can and improving every time, new expressions of creativity are seen. The mind, emotions, and actions, head, heart and hands, become aligned. This balanced expression is seva.

In the ashram environment one is encouraged to move into the component of seva by learning how to divert and direct the normal actions that are performed every day and by identifying with actions that are usually ignored because we feel they are menial. These ideas are expressions of the ego.

Swadhyaya

Other components of ashram life are based on *swadhyaya*, self-study, and trying to rectify the personality imbalances which restrict and inhibit growth by managing our strengths and weaknesses, ambitions and needs. Maintaining a spiritual diary is part of this process. Self-study is a process of jnana yoga. The purpose of jnana yoga is to become self-aware, to know oneself in and out. The purpose of swadhyaya is to know the personality traits, the behaviours of consciousness in different situations and to improve our responses.

Internal changes can be observed by taking stock of the strengths and weaknesses, ambitions and needs, for they are clear indicators of a change that is experienced in the mind and consciousness. Strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs reflect a particular conditioning of mind, a particular habit of character, and these conditionings and habits make us what we are. Awareness of these four components of the personality balances the expressive nature and attitude.

Negative traits always outweigh positive ones. Most people try to remove their negative traits, but they fail due to the

negative aspects of their personality, besides, their normal environment does not provide the opportunity to live with a new set of habits. Yoga says let the negative be there and cultivate the positive. As positive qualities increase, negative traits will drop away. Cultivating the positive is the trademark of ashram culture.

Discipline

Another important aspect of ashram culture is discipline, *anushasana*. In the ashram, discipline begins with a routine, a time to get up, a time to sleep, a time for meals, a time for other activities. This routine does not change, and everyone who comes to the ashram experiences it. By following a pattern, there is a balance between optimum rest and maximum activity. Three meals a day and nothing in between is good for the digestion. In a regulated lifestyle, imbalances are avoided and there is an increase in immunity and health. Yoga recognizes good health as having good digestion and being able to sleep the moment you put your head on the pillow. Not being able to sleep and resorting to tablets is the worst kind of situation to find oneself in. Whether it is due to stress or tension, it indicates an imbalance that has developed to a point where you have lost control over your natural processes. Most of the activities that we adopt to help us rest are cerebral and sensorial and stimulate the energies more.

The ashram routine brings about discipline in your life. You then need to take it back home and adjust your lifestyle to the best of your ability. Maintain that regularity and routine so that a new conditioning can be created for the system. Sleep at a certain time, wake up a certain time. The anushasan component is mainly to create another set of habits or conditionings which can help you to grow in life, which can give you the feeling of health, dynamism and vibrancy.

These have been the general components or ideas behind the creation of the ashram.

LIVING IN THE ASHRAM

Maintaining the ashram environment

The ashram is an intricate organization because some people work to maintain the ashram environment and others simply come to enjoy the environment. Both are two different experiences. The group which maintains the ashram environment has to be dedicated and disciplined and the group which comes to enjoy the ashram environment and learn from it has to be receptive and open. For those who are involved and dedicated, the disciplines have to be much more intense than for the group that only stays for a little while and then goes away. There is not only work happening in the ashram. Along with work our growth is taking place, and in order to maintain the momentum, one has to be more committed to the process.

There has to be an adjustment between personal ideas and the ashram routine. That adjustment can only happen if there is commitment. Therefore, the administrators or those responsible for creating the environment have to be much more committed and dedicated than ever before because they are responsible for building up the energy of the ashram, with their own energy, strength and discipline, with their own *sanyam*, restraints.

Ashram is not a community

The group who come to enjoy the ashram think in terms of community, but in reality, community is not an ashram concept. Ashrams in the past have never been communities; they have always been gurukuls, the guru's school. They have never been called communities in the sense of the word community. When people see a group of dedicated people working hard, they get the idea that the ashram is a nice community, and they want to be part of that community. The community structure is then created in everyone's mind. The word community also evokes the idea of having your own life and participating in communal activities, so you are maintaining your private life and participating in the communal life.

In the ashram the concept of private life does not exist. Why do you want to live a private life in the ashram when you can do it outside? An ashram is mainly a school where you are taught skills and then you leave. It is not a permanent abode or the official residence of people who wear geru. It is a school where even the professors retire and leave when their role is over.

Swami Satyananda left the ashram when his role was over. He did not remain with the comforts and luxuries that Ganga Darshan could offer. He said that the ashram was not his private place. Many people had contributed to the development of the ashram for a specific reason, with a purpose, to establish or create a vision, a mission, and he said that he had no right to use a single cent of the ashram for his personal use, and he left. Sri Swamiji emphasized that the ashram is a school, not the residence of people who have retired. Those who have retired should move out and live in isolation, totally disconnected from the ashram. When I finally retire, I also won't be dependent on an ashram but on my own efforts and strengths.

Therefore, the idea of community has never been part of the ashram. The community idea has come into the minds of those who have visited the ashram but not in the minds of those who live in the ashram. Communities won't work in an ashram environment. Various spiritual communities have come up, but they have failed. The community which starts with spiritual aspirations eventually ends up being a social club. I do not believe that there can ever be an enforced spiritual community, because spiritual beings are like lions, and no two lions stay in the same den. They need to be free, they need to be independent and they need to do their own job. That is all.

Ashram is a training ground

For the duration of your stay in the ashram, educating yourself, training yourself, learning new things, you become part of the ashram family. When we become part of the ashram family, we become bare, like an open book, in front

of other people. Due to the close associations, we know the weaknesses and strengths of each one and we also react and respond to that. In the kitchen of Mangrove Mountain, when the meals are being cooked, although there are many people working in the same environment, each one will be reacting and responding differently to their assistants and helpers. Somebody might be crying, somebody might be laughing, somebody might be cursing and somebody might be ignoring.

Accepting other people is the most difficult thing to experience in an ashram. We begin to react to those with whom we live in close proximity. Only the guru or the master can accept people. Others react strongly and they bring their reaction to the guru. They say, "I am not going to work with that person. Can you change my department?" Spiritual understanding and ideas of acceptance, observation, rectification, balance and harmony are gone. Therefore, the ashram becomes an intense testing ground to see how much we have progressed.

There needs to be a clear distinction between the human involvement in an ashram and the ideas with which ashrams are established, and how the human participation can alter the ideas for which the ashram has been established. It is all a question of experimenting with oneself. The ashram is a training ground where one becomes qualified in many areas of life. Being qualified is the criteria for success in life, not education. One can succeed as a carpenter or stonemason if one is qualified, but somebody fresh out of college with a degree in hand, without any practical training is not qualified.

Sri Swamiji says that he is what he is today due to what he learned in the ashram from his guru. Those things which he studied in school and college have never helped him in his life. They have only given a degree, a recognition, nothing more than that. What he learnt in his guru's, Swami Sivananda's, ashram, are the things that have helped him become a better human being. We can understand from his statement that there are two levels of education. One is

intellectual, which one gains in school, college or university, and one is experiential, which one gains when one comes to an ashram and follows the ashram disciplines.

In the last fifty years, the people who have come and gone through the ashram have excelled in whatever field they have gone into. People who have been trained in the ashram for many years fit in any profession, in any job, when they come out because they have that experience and they are able to live a professional life due to their qualification. In Rikhia, there may be a thousand people, but you will never find a single person idle. Each one is busy from morning to night. Where does all that work come from? How are all those jobs generated? The energy is such that one is pulled into that flow and never feels there is nothing to do. The energy is like that because of the commitment and dedication of the group of people. Possibly they are more on their toes because of the presence of Sri Swamiji, but at the same time, if that commitment and conviction is in our mind and heart, then that energy can be recreated anywhere. We are connected to a purpose, not to a person. The person is incidental. Today I am sitting here, tomorrow somebody else will sit here and give you a lecture. We have connected with yoga because of the process. We have connected with the ashram because of a process. We have connected with the sannyasa lifestyle because of a process. If there was no possibility for development in that process, sannyasa, yoga or ashram would have no meaning.

Those who come to the ashram should remember that they have to contribute to the betterment of the ashram environment in their own little way. It is not that everybody has to carry large rocks to build the bridge; some people can carry sand to fill in the gaps and that job is equally as important. There has to be awareness and understanding of one's role and one's contribution to the development of this process in the ashram, to the development of the process in yoga, to the development of the process in sannyasa. One has to remind oneself again and again of this process and continue to connect with it.

This is the secret of inner spiritual growth. Spiritual development does not come with asana, pranayama or meditation. There are thousands of people in the world who can close their eyes and meditate, but when they open their eyes they are the same person. The secret is our commitment and dedication to the process of development, whether it be to sannyasa, yoga or ashram. For some it is commitment to sannyasa, yoga and ashram, for others it is to ashram and yoga, for many it is to yoga only. Whatever it is, there has to be a commitment to go as far down the road as one can. There are many people standing on the fringe, saying, “Look, I found the road.” The fringe has become overcrowded with people who are staring at the road. When you find it, walk on it, if that is your destination. If it takes you to your destination, go towards it and put in a good day’s walk every day.

Satsang on Living Yoga

Ankaran, Slovenia

How does one know when to increase the time spent practising asana, pranayama, relaxation and meditation? Are there dangers when one does too much?

Use your common sense. When you feel the need to practise more asanas, you are free to do so because the body will demand it. It is like asking, when can I eat more and when can I eat less? It is the hunger of the stomach that decides how much has to go in. If you are starving and really hungry and have not had anything solid for a few days, you will keep on eating till you are bloated. If you have had a good breakfast, and then lunchtime comes and you are still half full, your body will know how much to eat. This is one reason why yoga emphasizes connecting with the experience and needs of your body and mind when you practise yoga techniques.

For regular practice, not much is necessary, only the important practices which can maintain your feeling of physical, mental and emotional wellbeing at a high level are necessary. When you develop the ability to observe yourself and the needs of your body, you will know when you need to loosen up and stretch because the body feels stiff, or when you need to practise more pranayama because you feel low in vitality. Reducing the time or increasing the time depends on the demands of the body and mind. So use your common sense.

Why are we here?

Let me remind you that you are here participating in a yoga program. Does that answer your question? The question refers to why we are here, in Ankaran, at this time and moment, not why we are here in this life. We are here for an encounter in yoga. Sri Swamiji said human destiny is spiritual awareness. The destiny of a flower is inherent in the object of the flower – to spread fragrance, to bring out the beautiful colours, to be liked and loved, to bring beauty to others. The destiny of a flower is to spread beauty, to spread fragrance, whether it is on a bush or in a vase in your room. Just as the destiny of a flower is inherent in the flower, the destiny of human beings is integrated in the life of an individual, and that destiny is spiritual awareness. Spiritual awareness means, not religious awareness, but awareness of one's inner nature. When we are able to discover our inner nature, the spiritual component of our life, then excellence comes in. Excellence leads to perfection. So you are here for the purpose of the yoga seminar, to understand why you are here in this life and to use the inspiration of spiritual awareness to grow in life.

What is death?

You will have to ask somebody who is already dead or wait till you come to that crossroad. Death is very much a personal experience. It is not different to sleep. When you sleep at night, you die: 'I swear by God, I die every night'. When you sleep, where do you go? Where is your body, where is your mind, where is your awareness, where is your memory, where is your identity? Sleep is the first experience of death and in death, sleep becomes permanent.

How can we accept the death of somebody we love?

There are only two options in life at that point – either you follow the person who is dead to express your love, or take charge of your life and destiny and continue your own life. You suffer when somebody dies due to an association, an identification, an attachment. If a stranger dies, it

doesn't affect you at all because there is no association, no identification, no relationship. Suffering only comes with the association, identification or contact between two people.

We have been talking about extracting ourselves from the socket of sensorial and mental identification with the world into a more balanced state of existence. When we come to that point of balance in our life, we also balance out our attachments, associations and relationships. Suffering is the cause of emotional dependency and loss of security. Emotional dependency can take place between people whenever there is an intimate identification or relationship. That is a *vritti* of the mind which needs to be balanced.

Death is something people want to avoid. In the *Mahabharata*, there is a question-answer session between two people. One question is: What is the biggest surprise in life? The answer is: Every day people see other people die and they know death is inevitable, but they don't want to die, they want to live eternally. We know that whatever is created has to be destroyed, whatever is born is going to die. Yet we believe that we can be an exception and our loved ones can be exceptions too. This is the apex of human ignorance. Why not accept the fact, knowing the reality of life, that if we are here today, we are gone tomorrow, and develop an association, a relationship with other people which is not emotionally dependent, but in the spirit of friendship and support.

There were three yogis who were always laughing and joking. Suddenly one died and was taken to be cremated. Many people came to see the cremation of this yogi, and many came out of curiosity to see whether the other two would shed tears of sorrow. When the fire was lit, there were fireworks going off all over the place. The two yogis had put fireworks around the dead man's body so when the fire was lit, the fireworks started, and those who were watching did not feel any sorrow.

That is one way of looking at life. The other way is to cry as much as you want. It is you who can change your own perceptions and attitudes, not me. So decide which kind of life you wish to lead, whether a dependent, sorrow and

suffering-filled life or a free, supportive and expressive life. Whatever style of life you choose to live, you have to make the necessary adjustments.

If I am doing the recommended mantras in bed, pranayama in the water closet, relaxation in the evening and meditation before sleeping, then when do I do the personal mantra?

One of the difficulties that yoga students face is their intensity in practice. Either they become deeply and intensely involved in the practice and sit meditating for a few hours, or they say, “Oh, I have extra work, I can’t find time to do my practices.” People have forgotten the skill of managing time. Despite extra work, you still sleep for six, seven or eight hours. What harm is there in sleeping for five hours and fifty minutes instead of six hours, and using those ten minutes for your personal development?

If you want to find the time, you can definitely do so. Spend five minutes less gossiping with people. Spend five minutes less eating or sleeping. You will have so much time that you won’t know what to do with it. Not having time is a false impression in the mind. There is plenty of time, you have to make use of it in the right manner. If you look at the amount of time wasted during the day, you will be surprised. If you look at the amount of time well used, you will again be surprised. There is a big gap between the two. So, take charge of your time and your life.

What are the sankalpas of a yogi or a yoga practitioner?

As individual human beings you can have aspirations for peace, prosperity and wellbeing. Yoga has its own sankalpas or directions, in which you are able to direct your energies and forces to experience them.

You do Shanti Path every day. The first line of the Shanti Path, *Asato maa sadgamaya*, is a sankalpa, the desire to walk towards truth from untruth. Make every effort to walk the path of truth and you will live this first sankalpa. The next line, *Tamaso maa jyotirgamaya*, lead me from darkness to light, is an affirmation you make to yourself for your development.

Mrityormaa 'mritam gamaya, from death to immortality, is an affirmation to recognize the true nature of life which is immortal, yet when you are here in this life, you are mortals. *Sarveshaam svastir bhavatu*, may there be wellbeing everywhere. Just as a bulb or a candle has to burn to give light, in the same manner, when you create the sankalpa of wellness for the entire world, you have to live that sankalpa in your life first. *Sarveshaam shaantir bhavatu*, let there be peace everywhere. You live peace in your life first. *Sarveshaam mangalam bhavatu*, let there be auspiciousness everywhere. Make your life an auspicious experience. *Sarveshaam poornam bhavatu*, let there be wholeness everywhere. You experience that wholeness within yourself.

These are the seven sankalpas. You experience and attain these sankalpas, or affirmations, when you go through a process of yogic sadhana. Through yogic sadhana, you live what you say. If you say *shanti*, peace, you experience shanti inside you before you are able to say it. If you say *poornam*, wholeness, you have to experience that wholeness before you actualize it through your life.

The mantra *Hari Om Tat Sat* is an affirmation of the divine nature as truth, as the reality. *Hari* is the cosmic consciousness, *Om* is the cosmic sound; sound is vibration, vibration is energy. So *Hari Om* is consciousness and energy. *Tat* means that, *Sat* means truth. The only truth in this world is consciousness and energy. The rest is illusion, a drama, a crisis of identity.

That identity crisis happens to everyone. When you see an actor playing a role in a movie, that actor is living the life of another person. On stage the actor can go through all the different emotions yet be free from them. In the same manner, we participate in our life wholeheartedly from the time of our birth to the time of our death. In this stage, we forget that we are acting and we identify with our acting. We forget our real self. When actors play a role, they know that it is only acting and the real self is separate from the role they are playing. Develop the mentality of an actor. Live your life to its fullest, but be separate from it.

Sometimes a strong flow of energy goes through my body and sometimes through my heart. I think this must be a love problem. Sometimes I find it hard and physically difficult to bear the pain. I know it is energy movement, but it is similar to pain. What is going on? Can I do something about it?

When we practise yoga, often we access subtle areas of our consciousness. Consciousness is divided into compartments and areas where different impressions, samskaras and memories are stored, and they are all hidden under the layers of subconscious and unconscious perceptions. I have purposely used the word perception in relation to subconscious and unconscious. As we internalize our awareness, we are able to perceive them momentarily. A momentary glimpse of what is in the unconscious, even of what is in the subconscious, can take place. That momentary awareness is enough to trigger its own group of responses. There are visual areas, auditory areas, memory areas and they all interact with each other. Underlying all of them is the energy, the pranic field. So, when a samskara comes up, or when a memory is released, then along with that many things are released, the pranic force, the visual impression and the auditory impression. A bullet which has not been fired can be held in the hand, but once it is fired it can't be stopped with the hand. It will go through the hand due to the force behind it. Similarly, the subtle impressions are released with the force of prana and as these impressions come up from the depths of the unconscious, they alter the behaviour of human nature.

When subtle impressions are released from the unconscious level, fear and insecurity will come. When they are released from the subconscious, the impressions and memories related to that particular event will come. As it is coming with such force, along with prana, the conscious is not able to witness it, recognize it or handle it, and then, depending on the major content within that experience, whether it is emotional or intellectual, vital or whatever, it will affect the corresponding chakra. If the content of that feeling, of that release is more emotional, you will feel it in the heart. If the content is more linear and logical, you will

feel it in your brain and mind, in ajna chakra. If the content of that release is related to vitality, dynamism and energy, you will feel it in manipura chakra.

In the absence of a conscious recollection, that release will be felt in the form of energy disturbance or even pain. The only way to deal with it is to witness it, to make the effort to remain balanced and allow it to pass. The same practices which you have been doing and which have become the cause of the release of that particular impression will also help overcome the agony of that impression. Therefore, with confidence keep on doing what you have been doing.

Teenagers are attracted by computers, music, sports, friends, and so on. How can we bring them to yoga and spirituality?

One thing is important. We lack a role model in our life. When we have a proper role model to emulate, our path is set before us. You were a child once upon a time, too. When you were a child, did you have anybody as your role model? No. You have children, too. Do your children have a role model today? No. If there are any role models, they are outside in the form of artists, actors and affluent people, people who are caught up in their own web of confusion, stress and distress. Swami Satyananda once said, "I am what I am today because I had a good example to follow in my life." His guru, Swami Sivananda, was his role model. I am lucky because my hero and my role model is my guru. In this way, if you can have a role model, a hero with whom you identify and whose qualities you try to imbibe, then you will have a better direction in life. Put a child in a conflicting situation and he will begin to think, "What would Rambo do in my situation? Take out a gun and start shooting." So the child will do that.

If you have Sri Swamiji as role model and you begin to think, "What would he do if he were in my situation?" and you discover that he would smile, you would also begin to smile. In life everyone needs a role model. Therefore, give opportunities to your children to discover their own role models. Let them participate in different activities and do

not try to enforce your ideas upon them. There are many children at this program and they are all busy doing their own thing, but they are imbibing the environment, the energy, the feeling of this place.

A boy, nine years old, came to see me yesterday. I came out of my room after the evening program and he was standing there. He said, "Hello, I have something for you." He gave me his wrist watch and said, "This is the most precious possession of my life, which I'm handing over to you." Does anything remain to be said? I don't think so. Why did a young boy of nine have the idea that he wanted to give something he held precious and dear to a swami? He had maybe only seen me once or twice before for a few hours. Something had gone on in him. Maybe somebody has become his role model.

I was told about another little girl who was six years old. When I visited the children's class in the afternoon, this girl was not in the room. Remember her age. When we had all left the room, she came in and asked the teachers, "Has Swamiji come here? Can you tell me everything that he said?" She was so involved in her question, which reflected a keen interest to know what had transpired between me and the other children behind her back.

Where did her inclination come from? Where did the boy's inclination come from? It came from a *samskara* which they have imbibed by being in close proximity to a good environment. Not only a good environment but also good people. Credit goes to their parents for having given them the opportunity to discover their own nature.

It is futile to think about how we can attract children to where our interests lie. You do not care about their interests so why should they care about your interests? When they want to go out and play with you, you say, "No I'm tired, tomorrow." That is the answer they give back to you when you tell them, "Come to yoga." "No, no, tomorrow." Their image of you is as a dictator. Parents are imposing their own views, ideas, interests and *samskaras* on children, but if you can be a friend to them and not a governing father, if you can be a support to them and not a heavy-duty mother, and develop and nurture

friendship between the two of you, you will be giving them the opportunity to choose their own direction in life.

Definitely young people have to be exposed to art and science. If they like computers, encourage them. If they like music, encourage them. If they like painting, drawing, sports and friends, encourage them. When they know that you support them, they will listen to you and they will also obey you. Give your children the opportunity to grow in the right direction and protect them from evil influences. Just as you would look after a sprout and protect it from harm, in the same manner take care of your children and protect them from harm. Support them and allow them to discover their own creativity and to live their own destiny. In that way, in friendly association with your children, you will be able to guide them to become a better human being.

Satsang on Yoga in Daily Life

Volkings, Germany

What is the difference between the concept of consciousness in yoga and the concept of consciousness in psychology?

Imagine infinite space and infinite time. Existence is a continuous experience. In the flat line of infinite space and infinite time a spark comes up, which becomes life. The spike is known as timed existence, not infinite existence. Infinity is horizontal and in that infinite horizontal line is the first emergence of life which is vertical, and it is in the life that you experience.

The totality of human experience is consciousness which can be defined. Imagine the ocean. On the surface of the ocean there is light, brightness, vision, perception, but if you dive into the ocean, as you go deeper and deeper, the light reduces and eventually at the bottom of the ocean there is absolute darkness, pitch blackness. There is light on the surface, less light in the middle and no light at the bottom. On the surface, where there is light, we are able to recognize our environment with the help of the senses and mind. That is conscious knowledge, conscious perception, but as we go deeper and the light becomes less, the perceptions and cognition become less. As we go deeper there is absence of cognition, absence of sensory perception because of the total darkness. In English the surface is known as consciousness, in Sanskrit as *jagrat*, which, means senses and mind interacting with the environment. The twilight area, where there is fifty percent less light, cognition and perception, in English is known as subconscious and in Sanskrit as *swapna*.

The depth of the ocean where there is absolute darkness, no cognition or sensory perception is known as the unconscious state, or *nidra* in Sanskrit. It is also known as *sushupti* where consciousness is not interacting with the environment.

From the yogic perspective, when you focus on something in the luminous area of the ocean, with the major chunk of light or conscious perceptions, you become aware of it. When you listen to the raindrops and focus on them, you become aware of them falling on the roof, but when you are focusing on something else, although your senses are listening to the raindrops, there is no cognition, no conscious perception of the raindrops. You are awake, you are alert and you are interacting with the world which happens through focusing the senses. Awareness is a particular quality of consciousness, which focuses on one event, on one experience. This is the difference between awareness and consciousness. Even in the state of wakefulness, you are not really aware. In order to become aware of something, the mind and the senses have to identify with it. This experience happens to you many times during the day: You are in a room and you are asked if you have seen a certain person in the room, your answer is no, although that person is sitting right there. Due to lack of identified perception or focus on that person, the presence of the person is not recognized. The same thing happens on a subtle level, the same thing happens on a visual and sensory level. Yoga says that even in the conscious state, you are only aware of that point where your senses have merged and focused. This conscious state is subject to the inputs that you receive through the agency of the senses and mind.

The next level is the subconscious, where the senses and mind are less active than the in conscious state. When people begin to experience the subconscious, they feel disconnected from the conscious perceptions. A partial disconnection with the conscious level happens at the subconscious level. In the third stage, the unconscious or *sushupti*, all the modifications of mind merge into that unconscious state.

The different levels of consciousness have been beautifully described in the *Mandukya Upanishad*. I have given you the

gist of the description. From the yogic perspective it is the fusion of the conscious, subconscious and unconscious which gives the experience of the wholeness of existence, and that experience of fusion is defined as superconscious or the *turiya* state. This is the yogic concept in a nutshell.

From the western point of view, consciousness is that of which you are aware. If you are unaware, you are unconscious.

Surface of ocean Lots of light	Consciousness	Jagrat	Maximum awareness, perception and cognition
Middle of ocean 50% less light	Subconscious	Swapna	Some awareness, perception and cognition
Bottom of ocean Absolute darkness	Unconscious	Nidra, sushupti	No awareness, perception or cognition
	Superconscious	Turiya	Fusion of all three states

Why is it said that it is by suffering that one grows spiritually? My life has been very smooth so far. Did I miss opportunities to grow?

Swami Sivananda said that nature throws a man into the crucible of pain in order to turn him into a sublime superman. The idea of suffering is associated with our ego expectations. When you don't have something, you desire it; when you have something, you desire something better. Pleasure and pain are aspects of the mind. There is the classic example of half a glass of water. Is that glass half full or half empty? If you say it is half empty, you are identifying with an absence of something, which will create a craving and associated feelings. If you say it is half full, you are aware of the fullness, not of the absence, and if you look at it from the perspective of being full, there won't be craving but an appreciation and joy. Many people live a pleasant, happy and comfortable life and yet they are unsatisfied. Many people have nothing, yet they are perfectly happy. So who decides what is suffering and what is pleasure? It is your own ego. Therefore, if you are identified with the

positive aspects of yourself, there is no suffering. If you are identified with the negative you, life is only suffering. What people say about suffering being necessary in spiritual life does not mean that you suffer to grow spiritually, but you transcend that negative restricted self to experience the wholeness.

Do we have free will or is everything predestined?

Singer or the song? You are given an empty apartment. You can't alter that apartment by breaking down the walls and constructing a new house, but definitely you can choose where to place the chairs, tables, bed, all the furniture in the house. You have the free will to decide which part of the room will be used for which purpose, but you live in a predetermined, defined structure of a house or flat. So inside the house you have free will and since you are not the constructor you have to live in what is given to you, that is predestined.

It is like a goat tied to a peg in the ground with a fifty foot rope. The goat has the freedom to move in a radius of one hundred feet, it has the freedom to eat grass in any direction, in any distance from the peg, but it can't free itself from the peg. What is predestined in our life? After birth, what is predestined? Infirmary, sickness, we all experience this, sometimes a cold, sometimes a headache, sometimes fever, sometimes asthma, sometimes cancer, sometimes HIV positive. So illness or disease, imbalance of the body, irregular habits of the body are there. The second thing that is predestined is old age. We start becoming old from the day we are born. The third thing that is predestined is death. Many people have tried to find immortal life, but they have failed. Beyond these three, everything is free will. So it is a simple concept.

To be or not to be? If I take action in the form of ending a difficult to dangerous marriage instead of suffering the slings and sorrows, am I failing and not working through karma?

A constructive marriage is to be cultivated, but one has to know the purpose of marrying to begin with. In this day and

age, we don't know the purpose behind marriage. Marriage is the fulfilment of our sensual and sensorial needs and to find security in life. Therefore, the marriage is guided by our sensual and sensorial attractions in the initial stage, and in that sensual and sensorial infatuation there is no logic. What is the purpose of marriage? Union between two natures, to support each other, to assist each other to grow harmoniously, to become a friend and to be an inspirer, to advance and progress in life, to understand each other's needs and to share the qualities of the heart. Nowadays most marriages are not based on a heart connection but due to 'falling' in love. People say they fell in love, loved each other and there was a crash, and that is the meaning of falling in love. I have never heard anyone say they have risen in love. If you fall in love, you fail in marriage. If you rise in love, marriage becomes constructive.

Can you tell us something about Christian Yoga?

This is only a brand name, like the Lacoste shirt brand name. After all a shirt is a shirt and no matter what brand name you use to define it, the shirt will remain a shirt. Yoga is neither Christian, nor Hindu, nor Buddhist, nor Islamic. Yoga is human culture, that's all. An opportunity, a process by which one can connect with the beauty of life. In this process of connecting with the beauties and qualities of life, if you use a preconceived idea, an image to identify with, then even the processes are recognized by that identified name. So, if as a Christian you identify with the cross and with Christ, and use that in order to go deeper into your nature, then if you like branded items you may use the label Christian yoga. If you identify with Buddha and his teachings, you may use the label Buddhist yoga.

However, can chemistry ever be Christian chemistry or Buddhist chemistry or Hindu chemistry? Can mathematics be German mathematics, English mathematics or Indian mathematics? No, mathematics is mathematics, physics is physics, science is science, universally accepted everywhere, and universally applicable to everyone who studies that

subject. Therefore, the sages of the past did not call their yoga Himalayan yoga. They only called it yoga, which means union. They identified that union with human beings, not with a race, a creed or a country or society. Now, in these times, yoga emerged fifty years ago from India, and therefore people tend to believe that it has to be Hindu, but it is not like that at all. When I was in South America in 1974 we looked into the ancient cultures of the land, and found evidence that yoga existed in the ancient cultures of South America. It has been discovered that yoga existed in Scandinavian countries. So does that yoga make Scandinavian yoga or South American yoga? Yoga is a culture of life and it has to be lived as a culture of life.

Is it necessary to have a guru?

Is it necessary to go to school and to learn from teachers? Is it necessary to marry externally or can one have an internal wife? Why don't you have an internal wife? Why do you have to get married outside in society and not just live with your wife inside? You feel the necessity of having a wife. If you cannot live with an inner wife, how can you ever live with an inner guru? When we search for support outside, why not have a guru outside, who will support us to grow spiritually? In my early days, many people used to tell me that it is not necessary to have a guru, that guru is an internal experience. I used to tell them that it is not necessary to have an external wife, as the wife can be experienced inside. You choose and decide whether you are happy with the outer one or the inner one.

What makes an action sattwic?

It is living a healthy human attitude, and that healthy human attitude can be the yogic attitude as well. An action becomes sattwic when there is creativity and positivity from your side. The action becomes sattwic when the fallout from that action is going to bring you joy and fulfilment. So doing the right thing at the right time is sattwic action. If you do the wrong thing at the wrong time, that won't be sattwic. So adjusting and fine-tuning the human attitude makes the action sattwic.

Was prophet Mohammed a yogi?

I believe he was. I'm not talking about the social or external acts but the achievements of the person. What were his achievements? He was in communication with the higher self, and that communication means living a yogic life. Yogi does not mean someone who practises asanas and pranayamas. Yogi does not mean one who practises meditation. Yogi means someone who is in tune with the cosmic will.

In history many beings have had that experience, the saints in the Christian tradition, the prophets in the Islamic tradition, the yogis of the Indian tradition, the Zen masters of the Chinese and Japanese traditions. Those who have lived a life in harmony with nature and the divine have been yogis. How they have been interpreted is the problem of non-yogis. People who interpret are non-yogis. Those who are trying to understand a concept or belief may not necessarily be yogis. Yoga is a personal experience which is not possible to define or teach. Only guidelines can be set out. You can be taught how to swim, and it is up to you to swim. You have to learn how to deal with the currents and tides, and that is your personal experience and effort, your personal achievement, but you have learned to swim. In the same manner, the yogi knows the art of swimming in the ocean of samsara. How others look at the swimmer depends on their own understanding of swimming.

In the first capsule, could I chant the Gayatri mantra first and then the Mahamrityunjaya mantra?

You are already changing my instructions according to your expectations and desire. My purpose is to tell you the correct way. I am asking you to put the horse before the cart, and you are asking me can you put the cart before the horse. You have wonderful wisdom, live it out. Learn to put the horse before the cart, not the cart before the horse. If that was possible, I would have told you that you could also do it in this manner. This is the folly that every student makes and therefore they never attain what is expected.

Shall I go committedly towards the path of self-realization after finishing my studies without indulging in marital affairs, or indulging? I am in intense love with the Almighty, Paramguruji, Swami Satyananda and yourself. I don't know what destiny has in store for me, but I wish to be integrated with the Almighty.

Let destiny unfold itself. The flower blooms in the bush, but it can decorate many homes, rooms and also necks and hearts. So learn to bloom wherever God has put you, and that will be your achievement. Wherever you bloom, appreciate the opportunity given to you by God for that unfoldment and development. Many times when the flower is beautiful it will be plucked and taken to decorate many rooms and many hearts. So, if you bloom in the right manner, maybe one day I will come and pluck you and put you in a place where you can spread your fragrance and beauty.

2008

Mangrove Yoga Ashram, Australia

16–25 April

Strunjan, Slovenia

18–20 May

Brijuni, Croatia

20-21 May

Balatonfoldvar, Hungary

22–25 May

Satyanandashram Hellas, Greece

27–29 May

Sofia, Bulgaria

30–31 May



The Spirit of Yoga

Understanding the yogic process and the spiritual process is one thing, but to awaken that strength within is another ball game altogether.

Finding the golden nugget

In order to find one small nugget of gold, we have to remove tonnes and tonnes of dirt and earth. Are we able to move the tonnes and tonnes of dirt and earth covering the golden nugget inside us? What have we gained from our involvement with yoga? A head-trip that takes us through many different roles. Sometimes there is acceptance, sometimes rejection, sometimes love, sometimes animosity, sometimes simplicity, sometimes arrogance, yet we feel that we are on the path of yoga. The time has come to reassess our involvement in yoga in relation to ourselves, and to find out what we have actually gained from it.

By wearing *geru*, or yellow, or white, you have been exposed to certain groups of people who have expressed their experiences in their own way, but beyond that nothing has happened. Maybe you can sit better in a cross-legged posture than previously; maybe you can sit with your eyes closed for half an hour, which previously you could not; maybe there is more control over the senses, which I doubt; maybe there is more control over your doubts, which again is dubious. We have tried everything under the sun from *yama* and *niyama*, from *asana*, *pranayama* to meditation, to *kriya*, to *kundalini*,

to chakra, to every system in the world. However, the question is: Are we able to remove the dirt which covers the golden nugget inside us? My answer is, not yet.

We have only looked at yoga as a process to become something, and with the idea of becoming something our expectations have skyrocketed and many times have been shattered as well. We have never looked at yoga as a continuous, evolving experience of life. If we consider yoga to be a continuous, evolving experience, it will give better results.

Body, mind, emotions and spirit

Yoga works in four areas: body, mind, emotions and spirit. The aim of yoga for the body is purification, removal of toxins to encourage optimum health so that the body does not restrict the growth of spiritual and mental development. Purification of the body, balance and harmony of the body, has a deep connection with the mind and emotions. If the body is at rest, the mind will be at rest, but if the body is full of toxins and impurities, the mind will be full of toxins and impurities. Therefore, when yogis conceived of hatha yoga, their original idea was detoxification, purification and harmony of the body. That is the first stepping stone.

In all your years of asana practice, have you been able to detoxify yourself? The answer is no. The aim of physical yoga is detoxification, and you have forgotten this aim for the sake of stretching the body to release the stresses. It should be done, but the purpose of hatha yoga is detoxification, not just to feel light.

The second component of yoga is mental. In developing the mind, people say meditation is a useful tool, but which aspect of the mind do we deal with in meditation? From the yogic perspective, the mind has four dimensions: *manas*, *buddhi*, *chitta* and *ahamkara*. *Manas* is contemplation, thinking, *buddhi* is intellect, *chitta* is impressions and memories, and *ahamkara* is self-identity. In meditation, we work at the level of *manas* only. In *pratyahara*, we are working at the level of *manas*, but we are unable to access *chitta* or

ahamkara, the ego principle. The approach to our nature and mind is also limited. We are only dealing with the surface of the mind, the mental expressions and experiences, without being able to go deep.

The third component is emotion. Are we able to balance our emotions and harmonize our sentiments? No. Despite many years of practice, still we are subject to the moods of our emotions, so where has the achievement been? People believe that bhakti yoga is the right method for managing the emotions, but bhakti yoga again has been confined to the devotional aspect only, not as the process or practice which can lead to emotional harmony, and that understanding has to be developed as well.

The fourth component, spirit, is the golden nugget that we are trying to discover inside by removing the tonnes of dirt and soil which are covering that nugget in the form of *vasanas*, desires, expectations, misunderstandings, ignorance, lethargy, confusion. There is no freedom. We are looking for freedom, but we can't find it. We find ourselves shackled, but we don't have the key and if we get the key, it is the wrong one. So how can we live in its true spirit?

Towards excellence

Our theme is how to live yoga in the true sense so that we can walk the path of excellence. Life is a journey toward excellence, *poornata*, fulfilment, wholeness. The aim is excellence in all dimensions, in wisdom, in intellect, in performance, in sentiments, in passion, in living, in thinking, and in behaving. Once we reach this excellence, that is the fulfilment of the yogic process. Yoga ends there, but as it is said perfection cannot be defined. The moment you define perfection, it stops being perfect because it is an ongoing process.

We shall be looking at different means of acquiring mental and emotional balance. I am not going to discuss the physical and spiritual aspects. The physical you can deal with and manage, whether by standing in front of the mirror and seeing how you perform postures, or in the quietness of your

room. You have to decide to use hatha yoga and pranayama to acquire physical harmony. Remember that on your shelf there are many medicines, but you only need to take one, according to your need and requirement. So although hatha yoga and asana have many practices, you have to choose the right ones according to your need, age and capacity.

Spirituality is the outcome of a balanced personality. A balanced personality and appropriate expression make one spiritual. It connects one with the source of strength within. It expands the horizons of perception. It gives the understanding of what is appropriate and inappropriate. With right understanding, you are able to think, behave and function in an appropriate manner, and then spirituality dawns. Unless you acquire this balance, there is no need thinking about spirituality.

Our main focus is how to use the principles of yoga for awakening the faculties and balancing manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara, and how to harmonize the emotions and sentiments, so that they become the force, the power, to propel us into the spiritual dimension.

Development of consciousness from unmanifest to manifest

In order to understand the spirit of yoga, we have to go far back in time to a point where only space existed. Contained within that deep space were the qualities and components necessary for creation.

The energy unmanifest in space has been given the name Krishna consciousness. It is not Krishna the avatar or the Krishna of the *Bhagavad Gita*. The name *Krishna* means dormant energy, invisible energy, unmanifest energy. Krishna consciousness is at rest, not manifesting its qualities, not expressing its nature, just as in sleep at night there is no awareness of the body or surroundings, as the conscious faculty is dormant. In the unmanifest state of Krishna consciousness, there is harmony and tranquillity. In this peaceful Krishna state, movement begins to occur, just as in the morning when waking from sleep, consciousness starts to move and interact in the world. The movement of consciousness in this serene

state of existence also contains within it a motivation, a desire to manifest. This stirring in consciousness has been called yogamaya.

Yogamaya represents the creative power of Krishna consciousness. Yogamaya, the energy inherent in consciousness, can unite and separate. The word *yoga* means union, merger, fusion, and *maya* means disunion, separation. When this energy manifests, it can also overcome and dominate oneness. The potency of fire is contained in unmanifest form in wood, and when it emerges, it changes the form of wood to ash. Similarly, Krishna consciousness, the undefined, invisible, unmanifest consciousness, contains the possibility of two forces, yoga and maya. The potency of energy comes into play when consciousness begins to awaken. The shakti of yogamaya has been named the divine creatrix, the power of creation. Maya is the power of creation, consciousness and energy. Krishna consciousness and yogamaya are eternal principles.

With the development of yogamaya comes the awakening of Shiva consciousness. *Shiva* means benevolent, auspicious, good. When God created the universe, naturally the intention was to create beauty in life, so the first creation is the benevolent, happy, joyous, contented aspect of this consciousness. God is *satyam*, the reality, the truth which does not change at all, *shivam*, the benevolent which does not change at all, and *sundaram*, the beauty which is permanent. Satyam, shivam and sundaram are the three components of Shiva consciousness.

For a seed to burst so that a sprout can emerge, the creative power of Brahma consciousness is needed. The seed of creation is just a solid mass, but when the conditions and environment are right, the shell breaks open and the essence inside the seed begins to take a form. It becomes a tiny sprout from which eventually comes a tree with many roots, branches, leaves and fruits. That is Brahma consciousness, creation. Creation cannot happen without understanding, knowledge and learning, so Brahma consciousness comes endowed with the energy or shakti of Saraswati, knowledge, learning and understanding.

Next comes Vishnu consciousness, the consciousness that sustains all that has been created. To maintain what has been created, prosperity and affluence are needed, so that the conditions are right to be happy. If you have money, a good home and there is no struggle, the conditions are right to be happy, but without these means of survival, there is no happiness. Vishnu consciousness creates the right condition where happiness and fulfilment can be experienced. The shakti of Vishnu is Lakshmi, prosperity, the energy responsible for removing any absence of what is needed in life. If there is an absence in our life, Lakshmi helps to fill it. If there is a void, a vacuum causing distress, the power of Lakshmi comes to fill the vacuum and remove the distress, to bring happiness.

Next comes another Shiva consciousness, not the Shiva consciousness of the unmanifest dimension, but the consciousness of transformation, consciousness with the potential to create change. The shakti of Shiva is Shakti, there is no other name.

These are the various stages in the development of consciousness from cosmic to creation, from unmanifest to manifest.

Manifest creation

When the three forces and qualities of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva come together, material creation takes place. Before that, everything was unmanifest. Human beings are the result of that creation. We have evolved from a single cell entity into a complex body. The different stages of transformation we have gone through simply represent an interaction between consciousness, energy and matter. Energy and consciousness move matter, alter the shape of matter, giving it a different form. The combination and permutation of consciousness, energy and matter indicates the variety of life forms that we see on our planet and beyond, from insect to human being. Human beings represent a level of perfection in this combination and permutation of consciousness, energy and matter.

The most important faculty God has endowed human beings with is intelligence. Human beings are the only creatures endowed with buddhi, intellect. All forms of life have *ahamkara*, ego; they identify with their quality, nature, size and shape. Without *ahamkara* there would be no life. *Chitta* is also an integrated component of all life forms in the form of memory. *Manas* also exist in all life forms. It is instinctive in other life forms, but in human beings it functions at a higher level, a cognitive level, because it is influenced by *buddhi*, intellect. Only human beings have the quality of buddhi at present. Other life forms have *manas*, which is instinctive, but only human beings have the ability to know what is right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate, good and bad, and they can shape their actions according to their belief.

Buddhi

Buddhi is the ultimate faculty which human beings have. In relation to yoga, buddhi is positive and in relation to maya it is destructive. Therefore, many people in the past have said to use intellect and wisdom, to move from the negative and restrictive to the positive, expansive and constructive. The moment we move from the level of maya to the level of yoga, we lose this material identification and acquire the universal identification, the transcendental identification. Material identification is restricted to 'me and my needs' only. The transcendental or universal identification is not limited to 'me and my needs', but to 'me and the world around me'. This is the situation at present. We don't know how it will be in another thousand years. If we move on to other dimensions and planets, maybe our perception and thinking patterns will change, our evolution will change, and something else may happen. At present we are subject to the play of buddhi in our life. Buddhi determines everything, what we want and don't want, what we like and don't like, how we interact or not, how we behave, how we think, and so on.

From maya to yoga

When it comes to understanding ourselves, there are two approaches. Knowing and realizing our environment and how to adjust with it happens in the material dimension. How to manage our health and body, our mind and the feelings of fulfilment and satisfaction, and our emotions and the dependence, attachments and associations, happens at the material level.

Until now you have been unable to expose yourself to the spiritual level. You feel that spirituality is part of the material dimension, but in reality it is not. Imagine there are two electrical sockets and one plug. The plug is the individual. One socket represents material life, or maya. The three prongs and three holes represent sattwa, rajas and tamas, positive, negative and neutral. When you connect to a socket, electricity begins to flow through the positive, negative and neutral lines, sattwa, rajas and tamas. Sattwa, rajas and tamas is also material in our life through our connection with the world. The other socket represents spiritual life, or yoga. If you want to connect to it, you have to disconnect from the socket of material life first. The three pins of this socket are also sattwa, rajas and tamas, but at another level, the spiritual dimension.

All 'yoga' practices are actually viyoga practices, which separate you from your associations, attachments and involvements. Karma yoga is a viyoga process, separating attachments and expectations from performance, action. Bhakti yoga is a viyoga process, separation and reconnection. Raja yoga is viyoga. Pratyahara is separating awareness from the external world. Sage Patanjali says to become the *drashta*, the seer, the observer, to separate oneself from the world and be the witness of everything that happens. The entire yogic process is like removing the plug from maya, the world of senses, objects and distractions, and then connecting with the spiritual socket of yoga, where there is union, focus, one-pointedness. Therefore, *viyoga*, separation, is always experienced first, and *yoga*, merger, comes at the very end.

Dual role of buddhi

Buddhi or intellect is active due to the association between individual consciousness and the world of objects. Buddhi gives rise to emotions, sentiments, desires and expectations, all of which have two results, good and bad, positive and negative, depending how wisdom is applied. We definitely do not apply wisdom in our lives. We think we do, but we don't. Wisdom has far-reaching implications and consequences, not short-term goals. A decision made from wisdom will stay with us for our entire life for it is made with understanding and clarity. However, our decisions change frequently as we are influenced by desires, expectations, frustrations and passions.

Therefore, buddhi has a dual role to play. It can restrict knowledge and lead to limiting, destructive ideas and behaviour, or it can free one's understanding and knowledge, leading to expansive, constructive ideas and behaviour. When buddhi restricts knowledge, it becomes conditioning. Most indoctrination in society restricts the expression of intellect, buddhi. Social, religious, environmental and family conditionings restrict buddhi. They also stop the development of intellect, as you begin to impose your desires and expectations on others and do not allow them to remain free to follow their own choices in life. Parents want their children to follow their choices and indoctrinate and condition them accordingly.

When Swami Satyananda was a boy, his father wanted him to become a police officer, his mother wanted him to be a social worker, his brother wanted him to be an architect and his sister wanted him to become a medical doctor. They did not have bad intentions. Each one thought their idea was the best one for his development. What would your state be if you were pulled in four directions? Mentally you may feel happy with so many choices, but they have been influenced and conditioned by the inputs of other people. Where is your free will? Swami Satyananda decided to become a sannyasin. That was free will. Not being under anybody's influence, but choosing a life which is appropriate and fulfilling for oneself.

Our family, society, culture and religious conditioning shape our mind, expectations and life. Buddhi is involved at all levels, but buddhi is not free as it is always being conditioned and indoctrinated. If you apply wisdom and become what you really desire, it fulfils you, but if you follow someone else's advice, later on you will blame that person for your failure. Suffering, anxiety, frustration and aggression are the effect of buddhi. Intellect is the only quality which sentient beings have to decide their course in life. At present, the intellect is guiding and directing us in the material dimension.

Influence of the gunas on buddhi

Buddhi is subject to maya and only functions when influenced by maya. Under the influence of maya, buddhi is under the influence of tamas, rajas and sattwa, the three *gunas* or qualities of consciousness. If the intellect is tamasic by nature and character, the understanding, thinking, behaviour and aspirations will be coloured by tamas. Tamas represents the conditioned mind, and conditioning is difficult to change. It is hard to release little habits. An external example is the struggle to give up smoking. Internal habits have deeper roots in the personality. Our belief system, our aspirations, our life, is a condition of mind, what we want to become, achieve and acquire. The fixed nature is tamasic conditioning. We don't want to change it because the moment the tamasic nature changes, we begin to feel insecure. We expose ourselves to new inputs and experiences for which we are not ready. People cling to the tamasic state of consciousness. Tamas is not negative; it is simply the conditioning of our consciousness in this material dimension under the influence of maya.

Samskaras, karmic bondages or effects, attachments, expectations and self-oriented aspirations make tamasic conditioning more potent. Even the desire to become realized makes tamasic conditioning more potent, for we want to achieve it. Therefore, Buddha said that if you want to be realized, you have to give up the desire for realization. Don't condition yourself to that idea. Let go of the expectation and you will experience something transcendental and divine.

When buddhi is under the influence of rajas, dynamism and aggression are experienced. This drive has to be managed because it gives birth to ambitions and takes the focus away from immediate needs. Ambitions become important, and needs are sidelined.

In the tamasic state, conditioning is experienced. In the sattvic state, freedom and happiness are experienced. Sattwa is the most interesting quality of consciousness, for the search for happiness is actually the son of truth and faith. As long as you encounter truth, you will be happy. If there is untruth, your happiness will be disturbed. The moment you lose faith, the state of happiness is disturbed. So happiness is the son of truth and faith. Sattwa is the acquisition of truth and faith to acquire happiness, luminosity, effulgence, freedom and transcendence.

Vidya and avidya

Buddhi, the manifest form of the interactive consciousness in the world of senses and objects, is under the influence of maya. The opposite of buddhi is *atma*, the transcendental self. Buddhi interacts with the world of form and idea, the external perception, not the inner perception. When we look in a mirror, we think we are looking at ourselves and identify with that image, but we are only looking at a reflection, a reversed image. Similarly, we falsely identify with maya, which is not a true image of the self, but is reversed. Maya has two forms, *vidya*, knowledge, and *avidya*, ignorance. If we are ignorant of our own nature, goals and expectations, we move deeper into the field of maya. If we are clear about our direction and aim in life, we move into the level of vidya, knowing, and the intensity of maya is reduced.

The Nine Sadhanas of Bhakti Yoga

Yoga is always thought of as physical, but there is something beyond the physical and mental, which is attitudinal. Attitudinal yoga is the foundation of all yogas. The concepts of attitudinal yoga can be seen in karma yoga and in bhakti yoga. Karma yoga and bhakti yoga are not clearly understood in the East or in the West. Bhakti has always been identified as devotion, but bhakti yoga is beyond devotion. In reality, bhakti yoga is a sadhana, not adoration, worship, ringing bells, waving incense or lights, conducting havan or repeating mantras. Bhakti yoga is process of inner transformation. In the *Ramayana*, Sri Rama has defined nine stages or sadhanas of bhakti yoga. Just as raja yoga is known as *ashtanga yoga*, the eight limbs of yoga, similarly, bhakti is known as *navanga yoga*, nine limbs.

1. Satsang – positive associations

Satsang is the first component of the ninefold path of bhakti. In this path there is a transformation of what we feel and know, an expansion of our horizons of perception. As our perceptions develop, we begin to connect with other people. *Satsang* is being in the company of, or in association with truth, with good people who uplift and encourage us. *Sat* means truth, reality, that which really exists, and *sanga* means association with. Satsang is association with what is true and real. What is true and real for you, apart from the senses, mind, desires and expectations? What is the truth beyond the

material dimension? The concept of truth and reality begins with modification or fine-tuning of buddhi.

We create associations through *buddhi* or intellect. Associations determine how we are going to live our life. If we associate with good people, we will receive good samskaras, good thoughts, inspiration and motivation. If we associate with the wrong people, we will receive wrong samskaras, wrong ideas and thoughts. Buddhi is under the influence of tamas. Therefore, although we are searching for happiness, our association with tamasic buddhi does not allow contentment. Yoga says to choose the right association which uplifts you and makes you happy and contented.

The world has been seen as unreal, transient, changing all the time. Nothing remains constant. Those we consider to be our own are not. The husband, wife, friend relationship is only a social relationship. Nobody dies together. We are all individual beings, fulfilling and living our destiny, without knowing what that destiny is. We simply live, believing that if we live in this manner, we will be happy and that if we live in another manner, we will be unhappy. Happiness and unhappiness are the only two criteria of our life, but it is not destiny.

What is destined for human beings is to know that they are united. The feeling of union only happens when you are able to project your spirit outwards and see yourself in others, which Sri Swamiji calls *atmabhava*. A mother feels for her child because there is a connection between her and the child. You see yourself in your child and therefore you identify with that. Atmabhava is seeing yourself, not only in your child, but in other children, seeing your spirit in everyone.

Atmabhava is being able to see divinity, to see one's own spirit, in each and every one. Your spirit is divine. Your spirit is God, which in its ultimate form contains the aspects of satyam, shivam and sundaram. Atmabhava, being able to see oneself in others, is the point of transformation. It removes you from selfish attitudes to selfless expression. Without atmabhava, you become selfish, but with atmabhava you become selfless. Your suffering becomes mine and my suffering becomes yours.

Your happiness becomes mine and my happiness becomes yours.

In a selfless environment, I feel what you feel and you feel what I feel. This is the conversion of buddhi. Association leads to the conversion of buddhi. Therefore, we need to choose the right association. It should be an ideal association. My hero is my guru. Sri Swamiji's hero is his guru, Swami Sivananda. This identification represents an association. If my hero and my ideal is a bad person, then what I receive from that association will be bad.

The characteristics of good and bad people have been defined by Sri Rama in the *Ramayana*: "The conduct of good and bad people can be compared to sandalwood and an axe. The axe cuts down the sandal tree while the latter in turn perfumes the axe by imparting its virtue. Good people, as a rule, have no hankering for the pleasures of the senses, and are expressions of amiability, friendliness and other virtues. Good people grieve to see others in distress and rejoice at the sight of others' joy. They are even-minded and look upon none as their enemy. They are free from vanity and passion, and they are conquerors of greed, anger, joy and fear. Tender-hearted and compassionate to the distressed, they cherish guileless devotion in thought, word and deed and give honour to all. They are modest. Having no self-interested motive of their own, they are the abode of tranquillity, dispassion, humility and good humour. Such a person is a good person whose heart is a home of all such noble qualities as placidity, guilelessness, friendliness and devotion. They never swerve from control of their mind and senses. They never move away from correct behaviour and never utter a harsh word. Such people are dear to me."

"Now come the characteristics of the bad and impious, association with whom should be scrupulously avoided, for their company ever brings woe. The heart of the wicked suffers terrible agony for they burn at the sight of others' prosperity and happiness. Whenever they hear others reviled, they feel happy as though they had stumbled on a treasure lying on the road. They are devoted to sensuality, anger, arrogance

and greed. They are merciless, deceitful, crooked and impure. They bear enmity towards all without rhyme or reason, even those who are actively kind to them. They are fake in their dealings. They have falsehood in their dinner and falsehood in their breakfast. Whatever they eat is intended to deceive others. They speak honeyed words but they have stony hearts. Malevolent by nature, they enjoy others' wives and others' wealth, and take delight in slandering others. Such vile and sinful men are demons in a human body. Greed is their covering and greed is their bedding. They are given to sensual enjoyment and gluttony, and have no fear of punishment."

"If they ever hear anyone exalted, they heave a deep sigh as though they had an attack of ego, jealousy. When they find anyone in distress, they rejoice as though they had attained sovereignty of the whole world. Devoted to their own selfish interests, they antagonize their people. They recognize neither mother nor father, nor preceptor nor God. They bring ruin upon themselves. Overcome by infatuation, they bear malice for others and have no love for communion with good people. They are full of hypocrisy and deceit at heart, and outwardly have a saintly appearance." Therefore, association with such people should be avoided.

In the course of my life I have met many people, both good and bad, but I have not identified with them because ultimately they have no meaning in my life. My association with people is for a day, a week, a month or maybe even a lifetime. However, my association with my guru is eternal, not confined to one life. Life is short, eternity is not. That is the association I have to cultivate. That association is called satsang.

Sri Rama says in the *Ramayana*, "There is no virtue like benevolence and no meanness like oppressing others. This I declare to be the verdict of the Vedas and the wise. Those who inflict pain on others even after attaining the human body, suffer the terrible pangs of birth and death. Dominated by infatuation and devoted to selfish interest, men commit various sins and therefore ruin their prospects for a better life." These are the characteristics of good people and bad people.

All merits and demerits are products of maya. This is the final statement. The greatest merit is that they should cease to exist in one's eye. To discern them is ignorance. The merits and demerits in our life are the product of maya, our involvement, expectations and associations in the material dimension with the material mentality. The mind is not spiritual. Therefore, the first component of yoga or the spirit of yoga is to reassess one's associations.

Association is not only social and external, but also personal and internal. Internally we associate with our ideas, thoughts and beliefs, which for us are real because of our conditioning. If my conditioning begins to interfere with yours or your conditioning begins to interfere with mine, conflict will happen. Conflict happens in the mind too. Despite knowing what is right and wrong, it is difficult to tread the path of *dharma* or righteousness and very easy to tread the path of *adharma*, conflict, destruction and confusion. We associate with the tamasic aspect of ourselves, knowing fully well that there is another side to what we are thinking and experiencing. Some people associate with negative thinking all the time, finding fault and believing others are trying to harm and manipulate them. Association can also create problems if an expectation is not fulfilled or does not give happiness. Association with the wrong kind of person can create strife and not inspire us to overcome our limitations.

Defining and identifying our association is the first sadhana of bhakti yoga. Experiencing the true nature of the association, satsang, is the aim. In the *Ramayana*, Sri Rama makes the statement: "*Prathama bhagati santanha kara sangaa, Doosari rati mama kathaa prasangaa*", association with positive people and identification with strengths are the first and second sadhanas of bhakti.

2. Sadvichara – positive thinking

The second stage or sadhana of bhakti yoga is *sadvichara*, positive thinking in all situations and connecting and identifying with your inner strengths. When you experience

any difficulty or suffering, you pray to God to help you overcome your shortcomings and distress. You feel there is pain and suffering within and you cannot connect with the source of strength, so you pray to an outer figure, God, for help.

Another approach is to recognize our own strength and remain positive. It is difficult to maintain a balanced attitude in all situations. Arrogance has to be under control. If you are arrogant, you will see the negative in whatever is being said and done, and react. The moment you are able to manage your ego and learn humility, you will become more positive and, with humility, discover the strength within. In a tempest, a banyan tree can be uprooted by the force of the wind, but a humble blade of grass simply bends over and stands upright when the wind has gone. If you remain inflexible, you will be uprooted. Thinking you are so strong that nothing can shake you is your weakness, but if you begin to bend, that humility and acceptance will make you positive. It will give you complete control over your strengths for it will allow you to become humble and face situations with a positive attitude of mind.

How can you acquire positive thinking and connect with your inner strength? One answer is the SWAN principle. Identify the strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs. Try to increase the positive strength by ignoring the negative weakness. If you begin to look at what is negative and bad, that will dominate the entire mind. You will not be able to do justice to what is good because you will be feeling depressed, insecure and guilty. Instead of always identifying with the negative and limiting, begin to identify with their opposites and you will gain positivity and strength.

By identifying your strengths and weaknesses, you can say, "This is the real me." Don't hide behind the mask, but recognize who you truly are. Try to cultivate and develop your qualities and strengths and to go as far up as possible. See the shortcomings and offset them with a positive quality, a positive strength. The SWAN principle is a good technique to experience and understand the second requirement of bhakti

yoga, how to remain connected to one's own strengths and how to be positive.

Good thoughts uplift you. When you are connected to your strengths, you can overcome any obstacle in the world, but when negative thoughts come, gloom descends on the mind. Sadvichara, trying to maintain a positive frame of mind, is the second sadhana of bhakti yoga. It is not something you can practise for fifteen minutes in your meditation. As a sadhana, it has to be practised and applied in all situations from the time you wake up to the time you go to sleep.

One has to observe and learn to understand the mental behaviour. Learn to live in the present because that is when you begin to observe yourself. Otherwise the natural disposition is to live in the past and worry about the future. If you are able to bring your attention to the present, then past and future do not influence your mind, your nature. The past is there as an experience and the future is there as an inspiration. Living in the present and improving the present involves observing the mind to keep it on track. The moment you let go of the mind, it will again go back to its comfort corner, which is the past.

Live in the present, maintain a positive attitude all the time and associate with people who are positive all the time. If you associate with people who are negative about others, your thoughts will not remain positive either. Sri Rama stated that there should be no falsity or crookedness in life. This is the process of coming to this point where we can develop a guileless disposition, a mind free from perversity, and absolute contentment. When you live in the present, you will be contented. If you live in the past or future, there will be discontent.

The Upanishads tell the story of the demons, the devas and the humans, who early on in creation realized they needed a mandate from their maker, God, about how to live. On their way to God, there was a great thunderstorm. In the sound of the thunder, they all thought they heard the voice of God giving them a mandate. The demon representative thought he heard the command, "Be compassionate." The

demons in today's society are the terrorists who disrupt harmony and cause violence and suffering. The demons within are *kama*, negative passion and self-oriented desire, *krodha*, anger, and *lobha*, greed. The message to be compassionate is the antidote to these demons, the antidote to *tamas*.

The nature of *devas* is sensuality, to love pleasure and enjoyment. The message they heard was "Learn restraint." This is the antidote for *rajas*. The human nature is acquisitive. The human representative heard the mandate "Give, share." To develop *sattwa*, we have to transcend and transform the *vritti* of accumulation. Sharing increases *sattwa* and acquiring obscures *sattwa*. These are the three ideas given in the Upanishads to transform human nature.

These are the principles of *dharma*. *Dharma* is something which you hold and which uplifts you, *dharitri*. What you hold in your hands for your upliftment is *satyam*, truth, *shuddhata*, purity, *karuna*, compassion, and *daan*, giving. These are the four walls of *dharma* in which you have to live, but you have never lived in this house. The ceiling is transcendental consciousness, union with God, the expression of divinity, underneath whose shelter you live. There are two ways to live: to struggle, which represents ego, or surrender, to flow with life, 'Let thy will be done'. Once you learn how to surrender, you will find that all arrangements have been made for you. There is no ritual involved, just a realization that one is an instrument being played by a cosmic musician.

To bring about an improvement in life, you must understand the six stages of existence. The first stage is *asti*, I am what I am, the pure self, not tainted by *prakriti*, the material nature, or the three *gunas*. The second stage is coming into being. The third stage is transformation of the qualities of the mind and the heart. At school, the ignorant mind learns certain skills. The mind matures and develops, the sentiments develop. We identify with our parents, family, friends and enemies and our associations with them. This transformation takes place in our dormant mind, which is educated or activated, and for this to grow, you grow. Growth is the fourth stage of existence. The fifth stage is decay of the body, mind

and senses. The sixth stage is death. This is the journey of life.

We have to know how to fine-tune our transformative qualities and strengths. We have to know how to fine-tune our growth, physical, mental, psychological, spiritual, psychic. Other things will happen naturally. We are not responsible for the first two or the last two stages of life, which are natural processes. Yoga is aimed only at the third and fourth stages, transformation and growth, where improvement can come about. We have the potential to understand the transformative transcendental, energy, force, power and consciousness, and that is the effort of yoga. That was the effort of all spiritual traditions in the world before they became religions. The teaching is always universal for it is directed toward the upliftment of the individual, not the creation or formation of a society. Encouraging growth and transformation is also the principle of yoga. Growth and transformation do not come with asana and pranayama, but with an understanding of one's character, nature, and its expression.

3. Seva

The third sadhana of bhakti is *seva*, acting with faith and compassion. That is what you offer, by changing your attitude, managing your expectations and coming out of the self-centred approach and connecting with other people with the strength of compassion. Compassion also has to be practical. It must have wisdom and understanding. This aspect of bhakti is making yourself free from maliciousness and developing *sat bhava*, the feeling, the sentiment based on truth, compassion and the actual situation in which we live.

Seva, service, is becoming involved in the welfare of other people. Seva is without ego involvement and without expectation. Karma yoga is practising to develop immunity from the karmas. Through seva, you simply improve yourself. If you develop the idea that your involvement with karma is not for your gain but for a greater purpose and you are offering your seva, then you develop immunity to the effect of the karma.

Seva is service without ego, without expectation. Seva is not only the outer act being performed to help somebody, but also keeping the mind free from natural responses and reactions to a situation. This is the understanding of karma yoga in the *Bhagavad Gita* according to Sri Krishna. One definition of karma yoga is (5:11):

Yoginah karma kurvanti sangam tyaktvaatmashuddhaye;

Yogis perform actions without expectation, for inner purification.

When this becomes the purpose of action, or when the two components become involved in action, it becomes karma yoga. Another definition of karma yoga in the *Bhagavad Gita* is (2:48):

*Yogasthah kuru karmaani sangam tyaktvaa dhananjaya;
Siddhyasiddhyoh samo bhootvaa samatvam yoga uchyate.*

Perform action, O Arjuna, being steadfast in yoga, abandoning attachment and balanced in success and failure. Evenness of mind is the highest yoga.

This idea has been taken forward in the third stage of bhakti, where actions become seva. Action plus humility equals seva. Action minus expectation equals karma yoga.

4. Innocence

The fourth stage of bhakti yoga is being free from inner crookedness, guilelessness, having a mind that is innocent, simple and free from perversion. It is establishing more and more sattwa in one's life by getting away from influences which encourage manipulation, falsity and crookedness. At this stage, an attempt is being made to go beyond buddhi, the cause of crookedness. Buddhi, intellect, has been used in the first three stages of bhakti yoga. Now the rational, logical conditioning of mind is to be transformed into simplicity and innocence. When innocence and simplicity take root in the mind, crookedness goes away. When Christ said, "Be innocent

like a child in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.” To be innocent and simple, to shun crookedness, means the mind is coming out of the influence of tamas.

It can happen if we follow the path of meditation, introspection, observation and self-analysis. How do we become humble? The urge to control and manipulate the environment, friendships, associations, emotionally and intellectually, is natural in everyone. When we manipulate, guile and crookedness take root in the mind. The manipulative mentality can be overcome by the meditative process. Through pratyahara we clear the mind of its influences, impressions, stresses and negativity. Through dharana we try to purify and clean the heart space, the emotions and feelings. As the head and heart are cleaned, the mind will become free, simple and innocent.

Innocence also means an awakened mind. A crooked mind has limited vision. An innocent mind has broad vision. Innocence implies awareness, understanding and knowledge. It is not a dumb mind, where we don't think, realize or act. It is a pure, untainted mind. To maintain innocence we have to be watchful of everything that is happening and maintain our balance, optimism and clarity. Innocence is a clear state of mind, an awakened state of mind, where we are on guard all the time. This can happen through meditation, pratyahara for the mind and dharana for the heart and sentiments. This is the fourth sadhana of bhakti.

5. Mantra

The fifth stage of bhakti yoga is sadhana, specifically mantra sadhana. Mantras are sound vibrations. The effect of mantra sadhana is to connect one with the inner source of strength, which leads to the development of faith. Mantra sadhana can be in any convenient form, meditation, mantra japa, chanting, kirtan, bhajans. Whether sitting, walking or sleeping, the mantra sadhana continues inside.

Each mantra has a particular frequency and resonance which influences a psychic centre or *chakra*. Chanting a mantra mentally, such as *Om Namah Shivaya*, creates a

vibration, a wave pattern, in manomaya kosha. Thoughts are also creating wave patterns in manomaya kosha. Thoughts are like the little waves that continuously lap at the shore. Tsunamis, big waves, are the emotions. When you are trembling with fear, when you are depressed and nothing seems to be going right, that is a tsunami mind, something which is totally overpowering and you cannot free yourself from its effect. Mantra helps to pacify the mind, to manage these little waves and tsunamis.

Singing *Om Namah Shivaya* in the form of kirtan also creates a vibration in the environment. There are many types of mantra sadhana. Focusing on individual chakras, using the *bija* or seed mantras, is one sadhana. Repeating our mantra with the breath is another sadhana, like the process of ajapa japa. We can chant the mantra in the quietness of our room and just create a verbal, physical, auditory vibration by chanting it to ourselves. Often we chant *Om* in meditation and create a vibrational field around us.

We can chant mantra in the form of kirtan that lasts for one or two hours, even the whole night, and the energy generated is so intense and powerful that the entire mood changes. Sometimes ecstasy can be experienced. The entire mind changes, the perception changes and the energies begin to move, the pranas move. The fifteen pranas become active, the five major, the five minor and the five assistant pranas, and there is a feeling of elation and connection with the source of inner strength and inspiration.

Mantra chanting leads to the development of faith because you connect with your source of inner strength. That faith is based on the experience of the power within, not some abstract understanding, but something you have experienced, which is divine, transformative and transcendental. Faith here symbolizes the connection with the source of energy which is uplifting, inspiring and vitalizing, and which fuses the entire personality by changing the pranas. Awakened prana brings bliss to the body and mind. According to tantra, the pranas awaken at the time of sex and at the time of samadhi. At that time union is intensified, the inner feeling of oneness is

experienced, which is the activation of prana. Kirtan activates the pranas and takes one into an altered state of mind. So mantra sadhana and kirtan become the fifth stage of bhakti yoga.

6. Sanyam

Sanyam, the sixth sadhana of bhakti, has been identified as self-control or restraint, but there is another definition. Sanyam comes from the root *yama*, meaning ‘to hold’, so *sanyam* means ‘to hold together’. With sanyam, the entire personality is brought to a state of interactive harmony. The mind is in harmony with the emotions, the emotions are in harmony with the environment, the body is in harmony with the mind. Physical, mental, emotional, psychological and spiritual harmony is the ultimate sanyam.

Sanyam has to begin from the outer dimension and move inwards. It starts with control of the senses, *indriya sanyam*. Then comes *vani sanyam*, control of speech. Mental diarrhoea is released through the mouth. For *vani sanyam*, restraint and regulation of speech, *mouna sadhana*, the sadhana of silence, is prescribed. For *indriya sanyam*, regulation of the senses, meditation is prescribed.

Someone asked me whether practising a musical instrument for half an hour a day is as valid a form of meditation as sitting in complete silence. No music can beat the state of silence. If you move into the state of silence, you hear your own inner music, but as long as the outer music is playing, you can’t hear your inner music.

Mouna is practised in the ashram. When you come to the ashram from Sydney or a busy metropolis, the first thing you become aware of is silence. That silence fills you with happiness. In your city apartment, if somebody plays the saxophone next door, it will be diluted by all the other noise. So silence has its own attraction and power.

Mouna sadhana allows us to measure and be aware of the activity going on in the mind. *Mouna* means silence and comes from the root meaning ‘to measure’. Mouna helps us to measure and regulate our speech and thoughts. When we

are silent, we begin to observe our own self, our thoughts and feelings. If we are in a good frame of mind, we will do justice to that experience, but if we are in a bad frame of mind, the observation will not change anything. When our observations begin to help us, we will find that our thoughts, ideas and expressions become much clearer and no longer confused. We will be more focused and our words will have power.

Sanyam is observing the sensorial distractions and dissipations of the mind, and maintaining balance, harmony and transcendence. No matter what area of life you are involved in, there is sanyam, one-pointedness, understanding, awareness of your identification with the inner self, the higher self. The more you are in sanyam, the more finely tuned you are with that transcendental frequency and harmony. Sanyam is like tightening the strings of a guitar to tune them. When the senses run here and there, you have to control and guide them. When the mind runs here and there seeking pleasure, you have to tighten it.

Sensory control, speech control, mental control and emotional control are the four levels of sanyam. Sanyam is complete domination over the mental expressions and behaviour. You are deciding how the mind is to function, not the mind deciding how you are to act. This is mastery of sanyam. The mind always remains a major factor in your dealings with life, with your environment and even with the divine. Therefore, the mind has to be guided and directed. Sanyam is the process by which the mind can be pacified. This aspect of bhakti involves self-control and cultivation of positive virtues and qualities, which also involves one-pointedness. With sanyam, appropriate conduct happens naturally and spontaneously.

7. Sayujya

The seventh sadhana of bhakti yoga is *sayujya*, developing inner identity, the inner feeling of oneness, being able to perceive the spark of spirit within oneself and in everything around. That only happens if there is *atmabhava*, being able to project one's spirit and feel what the other person is feeling.

An eighteenth century Indian saint named Tukaram went on a pilgrimage from north to south India on foot. He collected water from the source of the Ganga in the Himalayas with the purpose of taking it to the Rameshwaram temple at the southern tip of India. It took Tukaram many months to complete this journey. As he was nearing the temple to offer the water, he saw a donkey, dying of thirst on the road. He said to God, "I see you dying of thirst in the body of a donkey, therefore, let me give you this water I have brought," and he gave the water to the donkey. Anyone else would have taken the water inside the temple and poured it over the Shivalingam, but Tukaram had the vision and perception that the divine spark is in each and everything.

Sri Swamiji has said that if you see a person who is sick and suffering, know that God inside that person is sick and suffering. If you see a person who is dying of thirst, know that it is God inside that person who is dying of thirst. If you see a person who is shivering in the cold, know that it is God inside that person who is shivering in the cold. You have to see that spark in each and everything. Do not allow your ego to intervene or interfere in that connection between you and the divine.

When you do the wrong thing, there is always divine intervention. When you do the right thing, again there is divine intervention, but this time you are carried in the hands of God. You experience that inner purity within yourself, which can only come when you become egoless. When the identity of oneness begins to develop, the ego subsides. The ego will always be the cause of duality and egolessness will be the cause of unity. Trying to let go of one's ego, arrogance and expectations, gradually letting go of one item at a time, leading to the experience of union within oneself, is the seventh component of bhakti, being free from ego.

Atmabhava is experienced at different levels. Once, I was a passenger in a car driving through a forest in Tasmania. We passed a giant willow tree beside a lake. I was watching it and spontaneously I lost body awareness and became the tree. I could feel everything the tree was feeling: the water lapping

at the base of the trunk, the roots in the ground, the birds sitting on the branches, the leaves falling off. I wondered what was happening. It was not a pleasant experience, for being used to the consciousness of a human, to suddenly have the consciousness of something else, is not at all pleasant. To feel being a tree one hundred percent is very uncomfortable. It took me some time to come out of that experience.

Such an experience can be considered samadhi, but it is at a lower level than the experience of oneness with the cosmic consciousness. That type of atmabhava, or identification, just happens whenever it is not desired, whenever one is not ready. Somehow the switch comes on.

The experience of atmabhava can be cultivated through developing compassion. Without compassion, atmabhava is impossible. To develop compassion, we must develop a deep inner feeling for others, which is much more powerful than an intellectual idea or concept. Atmabhava is not only a mental idea, projecting oneself to understand the suffering, nature or quality of others, but also connecting with others at the heart level.

When Swami Satyananda was performing sadhana in isolation, he did not see people. One day he came out of his sadhana, called Swami Satsangi and said, "In a nearby village there is a woman who has lost her husband in a fire. Her house has burnt down. She is sheltering under a tree with her three children. Find her and help her." How did he come to know this event had taken place? That is atmabhava, projecting oneself out into the world. One doesn't have to be in close proximity to someone to project oneself. It took Swami Satsangi a week to find the woman. Immediate assistance was given, a house was built, food and clothes were sent. Sri Swamiji's description had been accurate.

Even though Sri Swamiji was performing his sadhana in total isolation, he realized what had happened, because he was connected to the cosmic consciousness. This is the higher form of atmabhava, where distance does not matter, where at a higher level you are connected to each and every one. At that level you are able to know the right time to step in

to help the other person. That happens when you become one with the higher consciousness, which does not know the boundaries of time, space and object.

Sometime after this event, Sri Swamiji was asked, “Does God hear our prayers?” He answered, “Yes, God hears our prayers, but he does not take direct action himself, he inspires and motivates someone else to go and help that person.” When I heard this, I remembered the widow, crying out to God for help. Her cry was heard up there and then diverted down here, where ten kilometres away a person sitting in meditation had a vision of a burning house, a man dying, three children and a woman left homeless. It was so convincing that he did not even question whether it was his own mind creating an image, he knew it was real.

This is *sayujya*, the highest oneness, the highest form of union. At a lower level it was the experience I had of the tree, which gave me a glimpse into what the ultimate union can be. If you have to identify with everything in creation, then start with a tree. That was the message.

Atmabhava is the only way to achieve *sayujya*, oneness, union, identification, merger. Atmabhava is the only way to progress in spiritual life. You need to move from the selfish attitude where the focus is ‘me and mine’, to the selfless approach, where you are part of me. This is attitudinal yoga. Oneness, identification, atmabhava, is a multi-layered experience, the simplest form being mother and child, and the highest form becoming one with the cosmic consciousness, which knows no barrier of time, space and object.

8. Santosha

The eighth stage of bhakti yoga is *santosha*, contentment within and not finding fault with others. Both go hand in hand. Complete santosha is being contented and at peace. Many of you are contented but not at peace. You are happy, but still you try to find faults in other people, situations or circumstances, believing that if they would change, you would become even more contented and happy. That is the ego principle again playing up: ‘I want more, this is

not enough.’ If you observe yourself, you will find you are discontented whenever you criticize others, the situation or the environment. Santosha means accepting the realities of the situation in which you find yourself, and leaving the critical mind behind, freeing the mind from searching for falsity. Just be in tune with yourself. Once you begin to vibrate in a positive manner, your energy will influence your surroundings and others will be uplifted when you interact with them.

9. Samadhana

The ninth stage of bhakti is creative involvement in the world with purity of spirit. The experience of merger is not the end of bhakti yoga. Creative participation in the world, with positive and constructive interactions and implicit faith, is the expression and fulfilment of what has been experienced in bhakti yoga. The outcome of bhakti yoga is a personality which sees no difference between people. The final outcome of bhakti yoga is an illuminated personality.

The sadhana and process of bhakti yoga

Bhakti yoga is a process of inner transformation. Bhakti is not a practice, but a sadhana by which we try to change certain attitudes, certain components of conditioning which exist in our life as impressions, as instincts, as patterns of behaviour, influenced by society, the culture and family. Bhakti yoga is a process, a sadhana, something that we practise all the time. It is a process of change in thinking, behaviour and performance. This is the way to excellence, and the only worthwhile goal in life.

The purpose of life is not self-realization, as it is too abstract a concept for us. A non-transcendental mind cannot understand the transcendental. Therefore, our effort has to be towards transforming the non-transcendental mind into a transcendental mind. Self-realization will be a natural outcome of this; there is no need to aim for it. Our effort has to be to improve the quality of our thinking, behaviour and performance. For this reason I have defined the aim of

life for myself as the acquisition of excellence. Excellence is combined with the three precepts of dharma, right thinking, right behaviour and right performance. These three pillars of dharma will take us to this level of excellence in life.

You can pick one of the nine sadhanas of bhakti yoga and try to acquire excellence in it. That will make you ever contented, free of crookedness and pure. In the *Ramayana*, Sri Rama says, “The path of bhakti requires neither mind control, nor sacrifice, nor japa, nor penance, nor fasting. What does it require? A guileless disposition, a mind free from perversity, and contentment with whatever may be had.” According to Sri Rama, this is all you need to develop bhakti. Thus, after defining the nine stages of bhakti, it is said to just perfect one. You need not go through the other eight stages. Just choose one and perfect it, and you will be in good hands.

Aspects of Bhakti

There are three aspects or perspectives of bhakti yoga which can be found in every treatise on bhakti yoga. They are jnanakanda, upasana and karmakanda.

Jnanakanda

Jnanakanda is the aspect of knowledge, knowing the aim, theory and scope of bhakti yoga and understanding how it can be applied in day-to-day life. The nine stages or limbs of bhakti yoga form a part of jnanakanda, by helping us to understand bhakti yoga and what it aspires for, which is a perfectly innocent and pure personality, untainted and untroubled by the tamas of the world. The *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, two scriptures which predate all structured systems of belief, represent the ancient idea of bhakti yoga as a process of inner purification, acquiring purity of mind, purity of emotion, purity of belief and purity in performance and interactions.

Purity is the main theme of bhakti. It is implied that natural devotion evolves as one becomes more and more pure, focused and one-pointed. Bhakti yoga says to deal with the personality and remove the rough edges. Plant the seeds of sattwa in the ground of tamas. Tamas is the soil of our personality in which we have to plant and nurture the seed of sattwa. The theory of bhakti yoga needs to be understood before going into the actual sadhanas and practices, which is why jnanakanda comes first. Incorporating bhakti yoga in daily life is part of upasana and karmakanda.

Upasana

The second aspect of bhakti yoga is upasana, the method of incorporating bhakti in one's life. *Asana* means 'seat or place' and the prefix *up* means 'to come closer', so *upasana* means 'sitting near'. You take a seat closer to yourself, which means you internalize yourself. Upasana is involving yourself in a process of redirecting the flow of energy of the emotions and sentiments. This happens through a meditative process, through mantra, through concentration, through kirtan, through *anushthana*, an extended period of mantra sadhana. Upasana means coming closer to yourself and becoming stable, being involved in a process of transformation, in a practice which deepens one's awareness.

Upasana is an internal practice. There are two kinds of practices, external and ritualistic, and internal and subtle. Practices which are internal, subtle and meditative are upasana. External rituals which use nature as the medium to commune with the divine are part of *karmakanda*, the aspect of ritual.

The tradition speaks of two methods of upasana, two ways of communing with God or the higher self. The first method is concentration on *nirakara*, the formless, attributeless, unmanifest. The second method is concentration on *sakara*, manifest form. There are different views as to what is manifest and what is unmanifest. Some say that concentration on an image, figure, idol, carving or picture is sakara upasana, or worship of a manifest form. Any process or method that you adopt to experience the transcendental quality has to be manifest. The breath is also a symbol on which you concentrate. If you think of a mantra such as *Om* or *Om Namah Shivaya*, the sentence, the word, the vibration, also becomes a symbol, a manifest form of energy. Focusing on the sun, moon, stars, a lake, a mountain, your own shadow, is also sakara or form, an object on which you are concentrating. The mind cannot function without a definite point of reference, which is sakara, or manifest form.

Whether you worship an idol with twenty hands, ten heads and two legs, or whether you concentrate on the image of a

distant star, the same thing is happening in the mind, but your belief, your interpretation can be different. Logic and intellectual interpretation is not relevant at that time. A distant star is a symbol and a ten-headed monster is also a symbol. With one you associate no attribute, as the star is there in form of a point of light. With the image you associate a quality. If you see the image of Shiva, apart from the picture, the quality comes to mind. If you associate with the image of Devi, Rama, Krishna or Guru, apart from the image, there is awareness of the quality and also an understanding that it is either divine or diabolical, so there is already a colouring to it. You are not free from that conditioning. Another image which does not contain such conditioning is an abstract image, like a distant star, but despite it not having a colouring, you know that it is a star. The association of idea with form is always there, you cannot negate this association, and that is called sakara worship.

The abstract form of sakara, where you are working with yourself, is upasana. Mantra, yantra, mandala, chakra and visualization are part of the manifest process of meditation, but they are more intimately connected with you and your inner psychic development. When you perceive a chakra, you don't see it as divine or demonical. You see it as being inside you, not as separate from you. So kriya yoga, kundalini yoga, mantra yoga, nada yoga, and chakra sadhanas are internal upasana, by which you are able to realize one particular state of existence, harmonize it and acquire purity and balance.

Karmakanda

Karmakanda is the third aspect of bhakti yoga, it is an external process, involving external ritual to connect oneself with nature and the transcendental reality. Karmakanda connects *jiva*, the individual consciousness, *maya* or *prakriti*, nature, and the transcendental consciousness. Karmakanda is represented by *havan*, the fire ritual, which celebrates the awakening of consciousness, the moment when humankind discovered fire. The entire nature around you can be used as a means to worship and adore the transcendental and the divine.

Prakriti is the force of creation through which the jiva comes to the divine. In this sequence, external rituals are involved such as *poojas*, small ceremonies that people can do in their home to create a centre of positive vibration, where they feel uplifted and at peace. Here the individual is trying to understand his role in life, his connection with the cosmos.

The ladder to realize the cosmos is through *prakriti*, nature, through the *tattwas*, the elements. You can begin to connect with the tattwas or elements of nature by having a small corner in your home to keep the things you consider spiritual: a little statue of a laughing Buddha, a small cross, an *Om* symbol, a photo of Jesus, a photo of Swami Sivananda or Satyananda, or maybe a picture of Shiva or Devi. That is your place of peace and prayer. This place is the simple form of creating a place of cosmic strength in your house. In all traditions, air, fire and water are the three tattwas used to worship the altar. Lighting a small *deepak*, an oil lamp or candle, represents fire, an incense stick represents the air element, and a little water represents the water element.

This is how the ancients used to connect with the divine prior to the existence of any structured religious belief. Cultural traditions of the past have always used nature to understand the transcendental. The so-called modern traditions have neglected nature. They try to find a straight connection between the manifest and the divine, and therefore they can never find the missing link. How can you make the big jump from manifest to unmanifest? You have to go through the stages of experiencing and knowing the subtle and the gross manifestations of nature.

Communing with the divine through nature

Before philosophical and religious systems came into existence, people used to commune with the divine in a simple way. The five elements are space, air, fire, water and earth. The power and grace of God is experienced in the element earth. Space is unmanifest matter. Earth is manifest matter. We survive because of the Earth. Earth has given everything in abundance. Mother Earth is the representative of the power,

benevolence and compassion of God. If you plant a seed in a handful of soil, it will sprout. Earth is always giving, but human beings return waste, polluting chemicals and fertilizers to the earth. The rampant destruction of this beautiful element now threatens our survival. Earth represents the ultimate power of God. It represents the ultimate power of prakriti.

There is an ancient practice which indicates how people used to connect with the divine before religions and temples were established. It is a simple way to connect with the transformative, nourishing power of Earth and see its connection with the transcendental. Take a lump of earth or clay in your hand and make a *pinda*, a shape, for example, a small oval-shaped Shivalingam. The base of the pinda is connected to *vasundhara*, the Earth, which gives everything in abundance for our welfare, happiness, health, joy, prosperity and peace. The tip is connected to the invisible power in space. This powerful symbol represents that which links the manifest and unmanifest dimensions of existence.

It is worshipped with three elements. Sprinkling a little water on it is worship with the water element. Placing a deepak or flame, in front of it is worship with the fire element. Waving incense is worship with the air element. It is a very simple idea. So, the pinda comes from the earth, reaches into space and is worshipped by the three elements in between. This ancient practice is a beautiful way of connecting with the elements and the power of prakriti, the power of shakti, which is inherent and contained in earth. We experience God's grace and abundance not through space, air, water or fire, but through earth. Earth gives us life, nourishment, sustenance and the opportunity to grow. In reality, the Earth is God. It represents the manifest power of the transcendental self or consciousness.

We have forgotten how to live naturally because of material glamour. Living naturally is connecting with each and every element within each and every being on this planet and also with the divine. That is the focus of bhakti yoga. In *karmakanda*, the aspect of ritual, this ritualistic interaction with nature takes place.

Later, many different images, concepts and theories were included in our worship. We have imposed our likes and dislikes and modified the natural form of worship. Placing a flower because we like it, is our addition, but it is not necessary and has no role to play. The simplest and most natural way is just connecting with those elements which have made it possible for life to come into being. This is the highest form of bhakti because it does not involve any kind of self-projection or adherence to any conditioning. Even Shiva or Devi are conditionings, although they are realities too. When we think of Shiva or Shakti, we are only thinking of one aspect of that cosmic quality. There has to be a focus, which is the *sakara* or manifest form of that divine quality. It can be a guru, an avatar, a master, an image, impression or symbol, but these are only used to channel our feelings and thoughts.

Our inner nature, our personality, our mind, is like a crystal ball, which has no colour of its own but reflects whichever colour it is associated with. Human emotion is like that; it has no colour, no character, no form, no shape. Emotions take on different colours according to their association. The same love, the same emotion can be both material and spiritual, but there has to be a connection. When we see our child, we feel affection. The emotion became affection when it connected with the child. It becomes love when connected to another person, greed when connected with money, jealousy when connected with somebody's affluence or greatness, anger or passion when connected with something different. It becomes bhakti, devotion, when it connected with the transcendental nature.

Just as anger is a natural expression, bhakti is also a natural expression. Nobody has to teach us how to be angry, passionate or envious. It happens naturally, due to identification, due to association. The same happens in bhakti. However, in order to create this focus of emotion, to experience bhakti, one needs a point of focus and concentration. Symbols play a major role. We perceive God or that reality only through symbols. If we see a crescent moon or a star, we know it is a symbol, if we see a cross an image, a form, we know it is a

symbol, if we see a painting of Sri Rama or Sri Krishna, Devi or Buddha, we know it is a symbol, and nothing more than a symbol. Something carved from a rock or a piece of wood remains a symbol. When focusing on our breath and doing our mantra, the breath and the mantra are symbols on which we are focusing. We focus on something manifest, something physical, and as we can identify with it, and it takes us deeper. Symbols and forms have an importance. That is sakara, manifest form.

How do we experience the unmanifest? To climb up on the roof we need to use a ladder; we can't simply jump from the ground floor to the roof with the strength in our legs. We need to climb the ladder, step by step. This is where the three aspects of bhakti, jnanakanda, upasana and karmakanda, become important. Jnanakanda is knowing what is required in order to live bhakti, the spirit of yoga, the spirit of union, where we are in harmony with the world and connected with the transcendental power. Upasana is a more meditative practice of attaining this internal connection by fine-tuning the personality and behaviour, whereas karmakanda, ritual, is the outer method, using nature as the ladder to access the divine.

Yogic perspective on bhakti yoga

From the yogic perspective, upasana is considered the highest sadhana because it does not involve identifying with a preset idea. Rather you are allowed to discover your own expressions and experiences which develop faith and belief. Without faith and belief, which is your own inner experience based on your own inner understanding, it becomes impossible to discover the divinity inside. There is a passage in the *Ramayana* which says that even siddhas who are not endowed with faith and belief cannot discover divinity within themselves. No matter how high you go on the spiritual ladder, if you are not connected with the transcendental energy, the spirit of yoga, the spirit of bhakti, yoga only remains half a process.

Yoga says that bhakti is an inner process of purification, transformation and connection with the inner self. It is

not about devotion. The concept of devotion came when structured belief systems or religions developed after the spiritual discoveries were made by the ancients. The ancient spiritual texts that give us the spirit and methods of bhakti yoga all predate the introduction of organized religion.

Bhakti in the Bhagavad Gita

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna has indicated the ultimate attainment of having balanced emotion. How does it make you a better human being? What qualities does it endow you with? How do you live when you become a bhakta? Sri Krishna says, “One who is free from malice towards all beings, who is friendly and compassionate to all, who has gone beyond the sense of ‘I and mine’ and ‘yours and thine’, and who is balanced in joy and sorrow, forgiving by nature, ever contented and internally united with me, that person is dear to me.”

In describing how this awareness has to develop, Sri Swamiji gives the example of a mother and child. Even though the mother is occupied with her work, she is aware of the child at the same time. She may not be watching the child all the time, but she is connected with the child. The same connection has to be maintained with God. You continue to live as you have been doing. The only difference is that your awareness is now connected with the cosmic self. This connection with the cosmic self is bhakti.

According to Sri Krishna, a bhakta is one who has subdued the mind, senses and body, who is not distracted and who does not crave enjoyment to stimulate the mind. We are always seeking new forms of enjoyment to feel happy. In this search for happiness the mind is diverted outwards and there is no connection internally. Therefore, one who has a firm resolve, not a wavering resolve, and who has surrendered the mind and reason – ‘mind’ meaning the desires and expectations, ‘reason’ meaning our justifications for what we are thinking and doing – is a bhakta. One who is both internally and externally pure, clever and impartial has gone above distractions, and who has left behind the feeling of doership

in all undertakings, knowing that something else is doing it, is a bhakta.

These are the qualifications of a bhakta given in the *Bhagavad Gita*. A *bhakta* is a person who is in the process of bhakti yoga. Nowhere does it say that every morning one has to do this fire ceremony with this mantra, then this ritual, then that ritual. Bhakti relates to the expressions and behaviours of our nature, personality and mind. Therefore, it cannot be said that the nine stages of bhakti are to be practised sequentially, as in ashtanga yoga. Acquiring excellence in any one of the nine sadhanas of bhakti yoga will lead to the experience of bhakti.

Relationship of bhakti yoga and raja yoga

Sage Patanjali's system of raja yoga starts with the yamas and niyamas. The yamas prepare the ground for the expression of bhakti. The foundations of bhakti are connecting with truth and faith to experience happiness, which is the first stage of bhakti yoga. Moving from tamasic conditionings to sattwic conditionings is the second stage of bhakti. We overcome the limiting factors of our life and try to connect with the illuminating factors. Similarly, clearing the heart of deviousness and crookedness, clearing the emotions of negative influences which bind the individual by generating karmas, and exploring how we can divert our emotions inwards so that we can have the understanding and experience of peace and oneness, is bhakti yoga.

The niyamas of raja yoga include *santosha*, contentment, and *ishwara pranidhana*, surrender to the divine will, so in raja yoga we are already creating the foundations for the development of bhakti yoga. It also indicates that *santosha* is equally important for the mind in raja yoga and the emotions in bhakti yoga. Similarly, *ishwara pranidhana* is important in raja yoga for mental peace and equally important in bhakti yoga for the development of identification. Therefore, the yamas and niyamas of raja yoga prepare the mind for the experience of bhakti.

Raja yoga is predominantly a mental process. In pratyahara, dharana and dhyana we are purifying the mind. In

samadhi we are still purifying the mind, as indicated by the stages of samadhi such as *sabija*, with seed, and *savichara*, with reason, which indicate there is still movement happening in the field of intellect. While raja yoga works with the upper levels of the mind, thoughts and mental experiences, bhakti yoga works at a deeper, more subtle and powerful level of emotions.

The concept of balanced intellect has been clarified in the second chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Arjuna asks Sri Krishna, “How does a man who is realized live in this world of senses and objects?” Sri Krishna answers, “The man who is realized lives in this world of senses and objects with an equipoised mind, *sthitaprajna*.” This equipoised mind is the state of samadhi. The raja yoga process deals with the development and awakening of the mind, from the conscious level to the turiya level.

The biggest and best faculty we have received in our life is *buddhi*, intellect. The intellect can either free us or bind us, like the two sides of a coin. One side is the head, which binds the ego, the other side is the tail, which gives you a kick and liberates you.

Bhakti yoga, the instincts and kundalini

Bhakti deals with a deeper level of expressions of consciousness. We call them emotions, not rationality, not logic, not linear and sequential understanding, but a more powerful and uncontrolled force of energy. Bhakti yoga says that these emotions are also expressions of the mind, expressions of the consciousness, but happening at a deep subtle level. They are the undercurrents which cannot be seen on the surface of the ocean, but which are powerful and strong enough to pull us out to sea and drown us. We can swim through vrittis on the surface, but *bhavana*, emotion, catches us, and because they are deep under the surface, they are also often guided by, and associated with, instincts.

Instincts are natural, unconscious, inbuilt behaviours responsible for survival. The four basic instincts of life are ahara, nidra, bhaya and maithuna. *Ahara* is craving happiness,

fulfilment, satisfaction: physical, mental, emotional. *Nidra* is sleep, disconnection, *bhaya* is insecurities, fears, and *maithuna* is sensuality and sexuality. Sexuality is represented in mooladhara. Swadhisthana represents fear and insecurity. Craving is represented in manipura, and nidra is represented in anahata, where you disconnect, disassociate.

Sensuality is a by-product of having come down to this earth. The original seat of kundalini is swadhisthana, not mooladhara. *Swadhisthana* means one's own abode, the abode of kundalini shakti. It has gone through insecurity, fear, change and transformation from a transcendental existence to a non-transcendental existence. When kundalini came into this material world due to the influences of the senses, mind, maya and prakriti, it came to rest in mooladhara. For the material person, kundalini is in mooladhara, but the real abode of kundalini is swadhisthana. As the mind becomes more material, it becomes more sensuous and the moment you begin to withdraw the mind, insecurity, the fear of losing, comes up, which is the swadhisthana experience. The moment you are able to manage your phobias, fears and insecurities, kundalini rises. Managing the insecure, fearful state of mind is much more difficult than trying to manage sexuality or cravings or even the desire to sleep.

In the yogic tradition, kundalini is at present in mooladhara, and therefore we have to try to awaken it from mooladhara. In the book *Kundalini Tantra*, Sri Swamiji says that the switch to awaken mooladhara is in ajna. The ajna practices are given first, before mooladhara, swadhisthana and the other practices. In the sequence described by yoga, mooladhara by itself is not a centre; it is the abyss, the pit in which kundalini has fallen after having come into this material dimension influenced by prakriti and maya.

When you work with ajna chakra, you develop intuition. In mooladhara you develop gross passion whereas ajna chakra is transformed passion. Intuition takes you beyond material attractions and bondage. Therefore, ajna chakra becomes the switch to awaken and stimulate mooladhara. Then you move to the level of swadhisthana. It is said in the yogic literature

that once kundalini passes through swadhisthana, and you are not fearful or insecure anymore, not afraid of change and able to move smoothly from the previous tamasic conditioning to the development of sattwic conditioning, there is no danger of falling again. Once kundalini passes through manipura, there is no going back because even the desires, the craving aspect, have been controlled. The ego has been overcome.

This helps us to understand the relevance of bhakti yoga along with other yogas. Raja yoga deals with the upper part of the interactive consciousness called the global mind, the social mind, the material mind, the worldly mind. Bhakti yoga deals with another range of inner experiences, mental experiences which are more subtle yet more powerful than the linear, logical experiences. The rawness of energy, shakti, is felt there. It is the balance between the rawness of shakti and the passivity of consciousness which leads to realization, the union of Shiva with Shakti in sahasrara.

Bhakti yoga sadhana

There are three ways we can develop bhakti: daily mantra sadhana, having a personal, uplifting space and weekly havan.

Mantra: The first method is through mantra and fine-tuning our attitudes and mind. Chanting the Mahamrityunjaya mantra eleven times, the Gayatri mantra eleven times and the thirty-two names of Durga three times daily, first thing every morning on waking, is part of this sadhana. The Mahamrityunjaya mantra is a healing mantra and should be done with the focus and sankalpa of healing the body, the mind and the total self. The Gayatri mantra should be chanted for the acquisition of wisdom. The Durga mantras should be chanted with the sankalpa of experiencing happiness and removing distress from life.

When you chant these three mantras every day with three sankalpas for healing, wisdom and happiness, you are planting three seeds of sattwa in the gross mind which is subject to tamas. You will begin to experience the energy within you becoming more balanced, the sense of wisdom and the right attitude developing and finding more happiness

in life. Happiness is illusive. Many spiritual masters have discovered that not only can suffering be overcome, not only can happiness be acquired, but you can transform yourself and become more universal, more connected with other people and less self-centred. So the sankalpa plays an important role in creating a positive conditioning of mind.

In raja yoga, after having controlled the five material vrittis, you have to create another vritti connected with your inner self, *brahmi vritti*, the spiritual vritti, the sattvic vritti. You negate the negative by creating a positive; you transform the negative by constructing a positive environment. One cannot be vrittiless, desireless, emotionless or actionless. Therefore, the ninth and last sadhana of bhakti yoga is to again involve yourself in the world, but this time with purity of self, purity of mind, purity of intention. Go into the world and shine.

If you have a guru mantra, it can be practised in the evening as a meditation, and if you are alone it can also be practised aloud in the morning after the first three mantras. When doing the personal mantra, disconnect from the world completely for that period. For ten minutes do not identify with your body or the needs of the body, with your mind or the needs of the mind. Try to immerse yourself in remembrance of the mantra. Just realize that you are the luminous self, free from experiences of comfort and discomfort, happiness and sorrow, totally stable, firm, fixed, one-pointed. For those ten minutes immerse yourself in the mantra. The deeper you go into the mantra, the more you connect with the vibrations of the mantra, which will change the gross conditioning of consciousness and awaken the subtle forces of consciousness.

Personal space of power and peace: Another bhakti yoga sadhana is having a special place in your home incorporating symbols that will uplift you. It is your corner of strength, power and peace. How you arrange the space is up to you, whether you place forms such as Ganesha or objects from nature. Such a space will create an uplifting vibration at home. It represents your reverence and respect for something transcendental and

spiritual. Honour it with flame, with incense and with water. Whenever you enter that space, you will feel peaceful, relaxed and quiet within. The mind will associate these feelings and experiences with that space.

Weekly havan: The third bhakti yoga sadhana that can be done at home is havan, connecting with nature. Once a week, on Saturday, take some wood and samagri, make a fire and chant the Mahamrityunjaya mantra. Fire intensifies the effect of the mantra. Any kind of mantra chanting will be more effective if it is done in front of a fire, as the fire tattwa will energize the mantra. Havan is the simplest form of using nature to connect with the divine. Mantra is the simplest form to merge the individual consciousness with the transcendental by cultivating inner intensity. Fire and havan celebrate the first awakening of consciousness by connecting with the spirit and energy of fire.

In your own life develop belief in what you do and faith in God. That is your personal experience. For many years, when Sri Swamiji was actively working for yoga, he never spoke on bhakti yoga. He used to say it was a personal subject. In those days people were wary of anything strange and alien. There was a big cultural gap in the world and people found it difficult to understand the concept of bhakti. Now everyone has moved closer together.

Realizing the self through bhakti

With yoga as the background of our sadhana, it becomes easy to understand bhakti as a means of finding internal purification, as a means of diverting the flow of energy from outer to inner, and creating a different association inside with our inner self. In yoga, the inner self is called *paramatman*, the cosmic self. As individual beings, *jivatman*, we have to connect with paramatman, the cosmic self. It has been said that God made us in his image, which means there is not much difference between us. The problem is similar to seeing ourselves in the mirror and wondering if the reversed image is the real me or is this the real me. The *Bhagavad Gita* states that the world is a reflection of the divine kingdom, so if the

world is a reflection of the divine kingdom, everything is topsy-turvy. Just as we see ourselves reversed in the mirror, the entire world is also a reflection of the divine kingdom reversed.

Bhakti becomes the way by which we can again turn our face, stop seeing the reflection and realize the actual self. That is the teaching of Vedanta and of Samkhya, which say that eventually we have to realize that the highest potential is within us. That highest potential is the attainment of purity, wellbeing and understanding, transformation of tamas into sattwa, trust and faith, happiness and contentment. This is the simplest form of bhakti that we can understand, as a process which leads to purification and sublimation of the entire life's experiences. Raja yoga only takes us to management of the mental dimension, but bhakti leads us to sublimation of the gross nature of life, which interacts in the material dimension.

Satsang on Spiritual Life

Life is so simple. Why is yoga so complicated?

If you have discovered simplicity in life, you don't need yoga. We have to go through the maze of our mind and through the maze of our attractions, attachments, bindings and influences to actually realize the potential which has been so well tied down by these coverings and knots in our personality that it becomes difficult to find simplicity. Do we find it through our head, intellect, or through our feelings and emotions, or through our involvement and participation in the world, or in isolation? No answer has been given. People have tried different methods, and some have succeeded, but the majority have not. Therefore, we have to find the right mix of sadhana for our life. It is all right to dabble a little bit here and there with asana, pranayama, shatkarma, hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, kundalini yoga, but beyond this we should have a firm routine to which we adhere, which becomes our personal sadhana. That is the purpose of having a well-regulated personal sadhana in our life.

Swami Sivananda always emphasized integration. He never said teach only hatha yoga, or only bhakti yoga, or only kirtan, or only renunciation. He said combine everything. Human beings are multi-dimensional. While at one time we are practising asana and pranayama, at another time yoga nidra and meditation, at another time mantra and kirtan, and at other times karma yoga, seva and havan. So incorporate

these spiritual principles in your life, in your routine. You have to know the right mix. A pinch of salt is enough to bring taste to a pot full of vegetables. A pinch of bhakti is enough to regularize and harmonize our life. A pinch of asana is enough to provide a sense of wellbeing. Therefore, the 'Song of Little' by Swami Sivananda says: Eat a little, drink a little, sleep a little, talk a little, meditate a little . . . Do everything a little bit. Then you will be able to digest it, enjoy it and crave a bit more of it.

You stress the importance of associating with those who are good. Can you provide some practical tips on dealing with close family members who don't make us happy or enrich us? Given they are family, it doesn't seem an option for us to stop associating with them.

One should not incorporate family into this idea. Family is family and any clash in the family is only a clash of interests. Conflict does not mean that everyone in the family is good or bad. Good does not mean following your line. If that is your perception, then you need to revise it. Right now, I feel that you are classifying everyone as good and bad, which is wrong. You are not good and the family is not bad. You are not bad and the family is not good. There is fifty percent good and bad in each one of us. If you have to associate with good ones, then select those who identify more with the positive fifty percent than with the negative fifty percent. Many people identify more with the negative half than the good half, which makes them critical, negative, gloomy, dark, destructive and depressed. If you identify with the positive fifty percent, you are affected.

So do not classify anyone as one hundred percent good or bad. You have to realize that just as your moods change, other people's moods also change. You have to be flexible enough to adjust to a mood swing, which is only an external projection. Positivity and negativity are internal. Therefore, seek people to associate with who are connected more with the positive fifty percent and avoid those who are deeply connected with the negative fifty percent.

In the *Yoga Sutras* also, it has been said (1:33):

*Maitrikarunamuditopekshanam sukhadukha
Punyapunyaavisayanam bhavanataschittaprasadanam.*

Be friendly with those who are content, meaning positive.
Feel compassion for those who suffer in life, who are lost.
Be happy, not jealous, for those who are virtuous and pious.
Ignore the crooked.

You may want to help them, but reality dictates the opposite. You cannot help the crooked. Crookedness is a condition of the mind; it is the stage where *tamas* is predominant. Our *sattwic* nature is not strong enough to deal with that negative *tamas* because we also fluctuate from that little bit of *sattwa* to something else, to something else. Therefore, it has been clearly stated in the *Yoga Sutras*, ignore the crooked, but be happy for those who are virtuous and pious, be friendly with those who are content, and be compassionate towards those who need support and encouragement, who are suffering and willing to change.

If you are able to maintain inner positivity, then you will also associate with the right people. They will be attracted to you, because like attracts like. Therefore, rather than worrying about how you relate to a person who is crooked and negative, think about how to adjust, adapt and maintain your own sanity in this crooked world, and that will be your achievement.

How can we know the tell-tale signs that alert us to whether the decisions we make are coming from the place of wisdom or from another place?

One has to grow up on this path before this realization comes. This question is like a ten- year-old child asking, “How will I know when I have been able to split the atom?” It is an irrelevant question. First go through your studies, cultivate inner maturity, intellectual maturity, learn the subject, and then you will know naturally the process of splitting the atom. How does one discover what the mind is saying and what the inner voice is saying? If you are trying to figure out where the

messages are coming from, there will be confusion until and unless you have bypassed your mind.

This is the room in which we are living and if there is a lot of noise, music playing on one side, a movie playing on another side, a nice sensory stimulation happening on the third side and you are surrounded by all the various sounds and movement in the room and hear something outside, how will you be able to identify the sound coming from outside? It could very well be part of your inside noise. In order to hear the outside noise, you have to still and silence the sounds inside. You have to stop every activity. You have to become silent and then you will be able to hear the sound from outside.

If you can attain silence in the mind, you can hear the voice from the spirit. If you have not been able to attain silence of the mind, then don't even think about it. It will never happen and if you think about it, you will become more confused. Therefore, just try to calm down the noises in the mind. That should be your sadhana, not trying to decide how to know the difference and the reality between the inner voice and your mental voice. You are not equipped to know that at present, so move into the space of silence first and in that absolute stillness of the spirit, you will hear the mandate. That only happens to a few, not to the majority, because the majority still identify with the cacophony of their mind, emotions and intellect. Only when you have cut all associations with the world around you and there is no distraction, no outer stimulus or input going inside, can you hear and know if what you have heard is the real truth. Therefore, your effort should be to silence yourself and not direct your microphone in some unknown region with the hope that you will pick up some ET's space talk. Many people have been trying for ages, and still haven't heard anything.

Swamiji, could you please speak to us about divine grace. What is it and how does one try and get it?

Divine grace will only be experienced if you become dear and friendly with your own inner spirit. Again the mind is the barrier which does not allow you to experience that grace.

After all, you have the capacity to be happy, so why do you feel pain and suffering? Why do you identify with it? Why don't you identify with happiness? When you can't identify and connect with happiness, how can you ever think of realizing the divine grace? So it is a distant reality in your life.

I do not agree with people who say they are searching for divine grace and who subject themselves to temporary satisfaction, temporary happiness, temporary conflict, temporary confusion, everything that is temporary. If you want to change into new clothes, you have to remove the clothes you are wearing first. So first you have to remove everything that you are wearing and become naked in front of yourself. We should know what we are. Just as you can see your naked body in front of a mirror, you should be able to see your naked mind, you should be able to see your intellect naked, without any covering, without any material or social identifications. Then you can clothe yourself in the clothes of divine grace, but first you have to become naked.

The process of becoming naked is the process of purification. Purify yourself a little bit more than before, one step at a time, and you will discover that divine grace was never far from you. You are unable to feel it because of all of the coverings on your body. You could not feel the warmth of the sun on your skin, but that does not mean that the sun wasn't there; it is shining all the time. Remove the layers to feel the rays of the sun touching the body. That is the grace you are surrounded by all the time. Where do you find air to breathe? Nowhere and everywhere. You are surrounded by it. Just as air is universal, divine grace is universal. In order to be a recipient, remove the trappings and coverings of ego, of expectation and materialistic behaviour, sensuous and sensorial behaviour. Discover the peace and harmony inside and you will discover that grace is always there with you. Nothing more than that.

How can I recreate the feeling of balance when I am no longer in the physical company of the guru?

This is a question on the guru-disciple relationship. There are two points, one's own spiritual inclination and the relationship

you cultivate with a guru, a master. In cultivating your own relationship and spiritual connection, you do not need a guru, only direction and guidance. The role of the guru becomes important when you are trying to make your life meaningful. The guru teaches you how to integrate the spiritual precepts into your normal, material, social environment. Otherwise there are millions around the world who follow a spiritual practice by receiving guidance and directions from the guru himself or herself, but do not connect with the guru as their guru. That is perfectly all right too.

Guru is a guide, a traffic policeman, standing at the crossroads and you are the driver, asking for directions, how to get from this point to that point. He tells you to take the third left, then the second right and you will be there. The driver follows the instruction and reaches the destination. He does not carry the traffic policeman with him to guide him in the car. That is the journey of every individual. You need direction, clarity and guidance. The guru provides it and you continue your journey alone.

Spiritual life is another dimension. When we move into spiritual life, there is no map. The guru has gone through that process and can anticipate the pitfalls. Therefore, the guru is in a better position to tell you where the pitfalls are and how to equip yourself in the right manner. The connection with the guru becomes an intimate one in the course of time.

Our expectations of the master change all the time. For the sake of our ego, we want a perfect master and we cannot accept any flaw in the master. However, anyone who comes into this world is tainted by the senses. When I was living in San Francisco, some people asked me for a mantra. I agreed and set a time fifteen days ahead. A few days later, somebody in the ashram had a birthday celebration and invited me out to a restaurant for dinner. The next day, the birthday boy told the class about the good time he had and that we had gone to a restaurant for dinner. The person who had asked for a mantra was sitting in the class and changed her mind when she heard this. 'How can my guru go to a restaurant? If he goes to a restaurant, he can't be my guru. He is not the right

person'. That happens when you connect with the critical mind and not with the simple, innocent mind.

When you connect with the critical mind, you always criticize the other person. Even if I have tea here, people say, "He is having tea, even though it is bad for the health. He is having coffee, I thought that spiritual beings did not have those desires." You are projecting your own ideas. If your ideas are perfect, you are the guru, and you don't need a guru. If you are not perfect, then please, give guru some space to breathe too. The guru-disciple relationship is very difficult to understand because the connection is not mental, it is a spiritual link.

Swami Satyananda lived with his guru, Swami Sivananda, for twelve years. He then left the ashram under the mandate of his guru and never saw his guru again, but the connection which he has even today, makes him aware of the presence of his guru all the time. He cannot forget it even for a moment. Swami Sivananda met his guru for only ten minutes in his life when he was being initiated and never again. That ten-minute association and that spirit fuelled the fire in him and made him one with his guru.

There are many such examples in history. Milarepa had to construct a house for his guru on top of a mountain, carrying rocks from the bottom of the mountain. He then had to bring them back down and reconstruct the house again, and then take them back up and reconstruct it again. He never said his guru was misusing or manipulating him. His faith in the guru made him greater than his guru. That was acknowledged by the master himself, who said that Milarepa had become greater than him. The connection is an inner connection, not a mental, intellectual, or critical connection.

One has to be careful to ensure that one's connection with the guru is always protected. If you plant a seed, you protect it from predators. You don't allow criticisms to nibble at the root of the sankalpa you have sown in your mind. Don't allow negativity to destroy the sprout of the seed which you have sown in your garden. If you can protect yourself from the negative influences of the world, you are well on the path of

understanding this inner connection with the transcendental nature. If you cannot protect your convictions, feelings and sankalpa from outer influences, then don't talk about grace or the relationship with the guru.

Think for yourself. I am not going to think for you. Think how you can protect the good and the beautiful that is inside you, so that it is a constant source of inspiration. If you lose a gold ring in the toilet, you don't flush it away, but retrieve it, wash it and wear it, because you know its value. Similarly, why do you flush away the guru if you don't like it, him or her? It is because you do not realize the value and worth of that connection. You have to know the value and the worth of the guru, just as you know the value and worth of gold; then the relationship can become fruitful. Otherwise the relationship with the guru is the same as the relationship you have at home with your husband, wife, children and friends, and it does not go beyond that. Maintain your clarity and protect your sankalpas. Only then will there be a give and take of love and inspiration between the guru and the disciple.

Can you talk to us on the use of opposites as discussed in the Yoga Sutras to change our dispositions?

The biggest challenge is how to change our dispositions. The method is simple although the idea is challenging. The first requirement is awareness. The second is personal analysis. The third is readjusting your direction in life. If you analyze your strengths and weaknesses, you can see the debilitating points of your personality and try to improve them by cultivating the opposite. You have the capacity for happiness within, yet you identify with suffering and feel gloomy. If you make the attempt to identify with happiness, the intensity of suffering will lessen, and your mind will be much freer to explore, to find different solutions, rather than be bogged down by the pressures of suffering. When you move from one thing to another, you are changing a disposition, an outlook, a perspective, an idea, a thought.

It is illogical to blame the world for everything. If anyone is to be blamed, it is you, not the world. In your lifetime, you

come with a set of preconceived ideas and expectations which make you blame the world for its inadequacy. Is the world to be blamed or is your expectation to be blamed? You have to cultivate the awareness that there is a happier side to yourself, your existence, your life. You have to move from gloomy to bright, from sorrow to happiness, from discontentment to contentment. It is always the connection with strength that makes you happier, and the connection with weakness that makes you unhappy.

Yoga says if you identify with a shortcoming, cultivate the opposite strength, and identify with it. We have been saying this for many years and still the same question is being asked. So I will remind you again. In the silence of your room, sit down with a pen and paper and write down everything you perceive to be your strengths. On another sheet, write down everything you perceive to be your shortcomings and weaknesses. These are good reference points to start your work and to begin to understand yourself. Every day you can add or subtract items until you discover a clear picture of who you are. Develop the positive, beautiful and harmonious. One little attempt in this direction will solve hundreds of problems.

Tantra and Yoga

Strunjan, Slovenia, 18–20 May 2008

From the eastern perspective, tantra is evolution whereas from the western perspective, tantra is the science of sexuality. There are two paths in the world. The first path is struggle, where people believe they are the centre of the universe and that without them nothing would function. Their mind is always searching for power and they try to manipulate the environment and other people. Their only expectation in life is control and power. There will always be struggle and clash of intentions on this path.

The other path is surrender, simply becoming an instrument being played by the cosmic power. When Sri Krishna was asked whom he loved, he replied, “I love the flute most for it is hollow and in that emptiness I can create melodies.” Becoming empty and having no barriers is the way to surrender. When we become empty we can experience divine grace, but if there are blockages, the divine grace cannot flow and no melody can be heard.

If there are blockages in the personality, there is bound to be struggle, conflict and confusion, but if one can become empty by freeing oneself of mental, psychological and emotional blockages and dissipations, surrender comes naturally.

How can this process of letting go of attachments, fixed beliefs, concepts and mentality be understood? The entire universe is a play of consciousness and energy, which have to be tapped for us to become free. Tantra evolved from

this idea. 'Tantra' comes from the words *tanoti*, denoting the expansion and experience of consciousness, and *trayati*, meaning liberating and releasing the dormant *shakti*, or energy.

Consciousness and energy are everywhere and impregnate the whole of creation. Each cell in the body contains consciousness and energy. This consciousness is not intelligence, but pure consciousness experienced in the form of life, which is an interplay between consciousness and energy. However, our consciousness is tainted and coloured by many things, so we are not able to experience it in the pure form.

The tantric perspective of consciousness manifesting in life is the basis of kundalini yoga. From the tantric perspective, what we call evolution is actually specialization, not evolution. In kundalini yoga, the highest chakra, sahasrara, is at the crown of the head and the lowest chakra, mooladhara, is at the base of the spine. Sahasrara represents the pure, untainted, uncoloured consciousness and mooladhara represents the conditioned, manifest consciousness. So the transcendental consciousness and transcendental shakti have actually stepped down and conditioned themselves to exist in the material, sensorial world.

Chakras

Just like there are different step-down transformers between a power station and our home so that the raw electric power can be brought down to a level where it can be used efficiently, in our life the chakras represent the step-down transformers. The highest generation point of transcendental consciousness and energy is sahasrara. When they go through a step-down transformer at this level, the transcendental quality of consciousness and energy are now defined in the form of mind at ajna chakra. Ajna chakra, the seat of the mind, is the finite expression of consciousness and energy, whereas sahasrara is the transcendental, infinite expression. Sahasrara represents the universal whereas ajna represents the individual mind. This individuality has to manifest at some place, and it does so through the different *tattwas*, elements, by

limiting itself more and more. So at the next level, vishuddhi chakra, energy and consciousness are further limited by the first tattwa, *akasha*, the space element. They take the form of space, which becomes the container of creation. At anahata, energy and consciousness are further limited and cause the birth of *vayu tattwa*, the air element. At manipura, *agni tattwa*, the fire element is generated. At swadhisthana, water, *apas tattwa*, comes into existence. At the lowest level, mooladhara chakra, the final condensation takes place in the form of matter, *prithvi tattwa*.

In tantra, Shakti is symbolized by an inverted triangle; the broad, expansive, transcendental experience comes to a point as matter. Just as in academic study, specialization follows broad-based study, similarly we have specialized in material existence. Our mind, thoughts, sentiments and expressions are connected with the senses. Our evolution begins once we come to this material plane. Evolution means starting from the bottom and going to the top whereas specialization means starting at the top with a broad base and coming down to a point.

Theory and practice

There are two aspects of tantra. The first is the theory, which is broad-based and explains where we are in this life. The second is the practices which take us from here into the transcendental. Tantric theory deals with how this broad-based consciousness and energy have come to a point and specialized in the form of life, creation and sensorial experience. The practical aspect of tantra deals with how to develop and evolve from where we are. In the process of specialization, coming down from above to below, energy separated from Shiva, consciousness. In tantra, creation can only happen if there is separation of consciousness and energy. So there has to be union of Shakti, who is at the gross, material level, with the transcendental Shiva in sahasrara. Shakti has to be raised from mooladhara back up to sahasrara where it can unite with consciousness.

Kundalini

The shakti in mooladhara is called kundalini. One definition of kundalini is the power which is bound by the three qualities of sattwa, rajas and tamas. Kundalini is generally viewed symbolically as a serpent in three and half coils. *Kundal* means coil, and *kundalini* means coiled energy. The three coils represent the bondage of the material world, tamas, rajas and sattwa. Energy is subject to the influence of these three *gunas*, or qualities, that govern life. The other definition of kundalini is derived from *kunda*, meaning pit, which can be conceived as an inverted triangle. Kundalini is energy which has come down into the pit, from the transcendental to the finite state. So kundalini yoga is a practice of tantra in which, through our sadhana, we try to raise this energy from mooladhara to sahasrara. Kundalini is the concern of yoga and tantra.

Chakras and kundalini are symbolic representations. Physiologically, the chakras are nerve plexuses in the body, connected to the brain, so awakening of a nerve plexus activates the corresponding centre in the brain. Psychically and spiritually this transformation at the physical level also transforms an individual's spiritual qualities, so we acquire greater balance, harmony and tranquillity within. As we progress from the pit of kundalini upwards, our mind and consciousness become more expansive, and kundalini yoga becomes a practice of the tantras.

What we call God is a transcendental reality, unconditional, constant and infinite, while life is a conditioned state of existence. From the transcendental state, we have transformed and mutated to our level of existence. This is specialization of energy from nothing into something specific. From this level of conditioned existence, we now have to free ourselves from the inner and outer conditionings. This freedom is *mukti*, *nirvana* or *moksha*, overcoming the conditions which restrict our total expression. At present, we are separate from our inner self and there has to be union. This union is the subject matter of tantra.

Connecting with spirit

There are two sockets, worldly and spiritual. Our individual plug is connected to the worldly socket at present. The three holes in the socket represent *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattwa*. The individual self is connected with the material, external, sensorial qualities of *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattwa*. The current running through us is coming from these connections. Even when we meditate, it is this external, material current flowing through us, not the spiritual current. No matter what we do, the current is always coming from the outer world. The spiritual current is not yet tapped. To connect to the spiritual current, we have to first extract our plug from the worldly socket and put it in the spiritual socket. Then the spiritual current will flow through and the entire perspective will change. In the first connection we are a part of the world, in the second connection the world becomes a part of us.

This can be seen in the saints and prophets who have appeared on this planet. Swami Satyananda is not part of the world, the world is part of him. It is the same with Swami Sivananda, Ramana Maharishi, Buddha, Christ and every other master. We have the same potential that they had. The only difference is that we aspire to become like them while remaining connected to the worldly socket, whereas they had connected themselves to the spiritual socket.

Mystical concepts cannot be experienced while we are connected to the material dimension. I have not seen anybody make the effort to even loosen that material connection, let alone extract himself completely and plug into the other socket. We want to have good experiences in our *sadhana*, practice and meditation, but we are unable to manage the basic reactions that influence us on a daily basis. We are obsessively connected with the material and sensorial dimensions of life. It is indeed difficult to detach oneself completely, but at least we can become aware of our connection with the world and manage it more effectively.

You have to put in safety systems, a surge protector, between the plug and the socket so there is no short-circuit in life. That surge protector is known as awareness. If you are

aware, you can observe, analyze, and become the *drashta*, the witness, of your connection with the world. Then you are a yogi. There are some rare people who have the strength to disconnect their plug from the material socket and connect with the spiritual socket. They are siddhas. So don't aspire to be a siddha, but aspire to be a yogi.

Sage Patanjali conveys this idea in the *Yoga Sutras*. Chitta vritti is the current of the world flowing into you. To manage the *chitta vrittis*, the modifications of the mind, you become the witness by cultivating awareness. Sage Patanjali made yama and niyama the first two stages of yoga so that the negative personality traits could be transformed into positive strengths. When the interactive behaviour pattern between the individual and the world is harmonized, you move into pratyahara, into dharana and into dhyana. How you conduct yourself constitutes the training of the yamas and niyamas. So there are five yogic rules of conducts, five *yamas* or yogic disciplines and five *niyamas* or efforts.

Siddhantachara

Tantra also says there are five conducts, *achara*, to experience freedom and transcendence: siddhantachara, yogachara, vedachara, dakshinachara and vamachara. *Siddha* means perfect, *anta* means end, *achara* means conduct, so *siddhantachara* means a conduct which has a positive, perfect end. Siddhanta also means philosophy or theory. The process of specialization, the shakti triangle, and the process of evolution is siddhanta, which has a perfect beginning and a perfect end. Siddhanta means understanding the theory of how we have come into existence and how to go from this point back to our source. Siddhantachara is understanding our connection with the universe. Knowing, understanding, experiencing and realizing constitute the path of siddhantachara.

Vedachara

The second conduct in tantra is *vedachara*, appropriate behaviour, thinking and action. Wisdom is an integral com-

ponent of appropriateness. There has to be appropriateness in our relationships, thinking, performance, behaviour and understanding. It also means being able to see ourselves clearly, not creating a false identity. Acquiring wisdom is the beginning of appropriate understanding, thinking and action. Through vedachara we discover how to live appropriately, using wisdom, cultivating understanding and harmonizing our environment.

Yogachara

The third conduct in tantra is *yogachara*, yogic effort, through which we bring health and wellbeing into our lives. Health means awareness of the underlying harmony between the body, mind, emotions, psyche, ethics and spirituality. Health is learning to manage disease more effectively and efficiently. Yoga has a comprehensive system to bring about awareness of personal health. Wellbeing is also an experience of wholeness and contentment.

There are two kinds of people in the world: those who are attached to and involved in the world, and the non-attached, renunciates, who have the ability to let go when necessary. Renunciation is not leaving family and friends and going somewhere else, but letting go of the desires, obsessions, expectations, beliefs and ideas which make up our identity. The moment we let go of the things that bind us to a gross level, we enter the dimension of yoga. This process of self-softening is renunciation.

Attachment is due to an obsessive sensorial involvement with the environment, friends, family and society, from whom we believe we receive love, affection, security and safety. With all those expectations, desires and ambitions, we can never become detached or free from the outer influences which cause reaction in our minds. So for these two types of people, those attached, involved and obsessed with the world, and the detached, those separate and free from the world, there are two different paths which come as the fourth and the fifth conducts.

Dakshinachara – right-hand path of tantra

The fourth conduct, *dakshinachara*, the right-hand path of tantra, is for the non-attached, spiritually awakened people who are aware they can disconnect from the world whenever they want to. It is for those who are liberated or striving for freedom from their desires, expectations and ambitions and want to experience the transcendental nature within. The common sadhana for the right-hand path is mantra, yantra and meditation. Mantra pacifies the normal behavioural patterns of the mind and generates an altered state where we are connected with inner strength, clarity and positivity. The mind, thought, feeling, emotion and words are manifestations or energetic emissions of consciousness. Mantra helps to focus these energies of consciousness, by stopping dissipation and connecting us with our inner self and inner strength.

In tantra, Shiva, or consciousness, is symbolized by a normal triangle, and Shakti by an inverted triangle. In sahasrara chakra, consciousness is focused, one-pointed and contained; in creation it begins to dissipate and enlarge at the bottom. At the material level, consciousness is dissipated and at the spiritual or higher level, consciousness is concentrated. Mantra eventually brings us to the point where the concentrated, unified consciousness can be experienced. Mantra acts at the level of consciousness and the interactive mind. Yantra is a map of the manifestations of energy at different levels. For example, the tradition describes Sri Yantra as the city where Shakti resides. Through meditation, this mantra and yantra can be realized by non-attached people.

Vamachara – left-hand path of tantra

The fifth conduct of tantra, *vamachara*, the left-hand path, is for those involved in the world, with family responsibilities, tensions, frustrations, likes and dislikes. Why are these two conducts called left and right? The right represents *pingala nadi*, the solar force, the masculine force or Shiva energy, and the left represents *ida nadi*, the lunar force, the mental force, the power of Shakti. When we practise sadhanas of the right-hand path, we are able to access subtle layers of consciousness.

Mahamrityunjaya mantra, Gayatri mantra and the meditations we practise belong to the right-hand path of tantra. The left-hand path deals with awakening the dormant energies.

In tantric symbology, Shiva is seen as *Ardhanarishwara*, half female and half male. It is a state of existence and experience where both poles are in perfect balance, half lunar, the feminine force, and half solar, the masculine force. Shiva is on the right side, representing the male principle, and Shakti is on the left side, representing the feminine principle. Therefore, the left-hand path is awakening the latent power inherent in this body. The energy manifesting at mooladhara chakra is a conditioned and limited expression of energy, subject to the three gunas of sattwa, rajas and tamas. When the energy is passive, it can be handled with relative ease, but if it becomes active, it is difficult to control. For example, when we experience aggression or anger, the energy manifesting at that time is raw, active and dynamic.

Managing the four instincts

The active energy, whose expression is conditioned in our life, manifests in the form of four instincts: *maithuna*, sexuality, *bhaya*, fear, *ahara*, craving and *nidra*, sleep. Sexuality is associated with mooladhara chakra, fear and insecurity with swadhisthana chakra, craving with manipura chakra, and *nidra*, passivity, with anahata chakra. These four instincts are the uncontrolled, instinctive expressions of cosmic energy in our physical existence.

Managing the instincts is the purpose of the left-hand path of tantra, which is also for people deeply connected with the world, with attachments and responsibilities which prevent them from pursuing a more balanced spiritual path. To cultivate spiritual awareness, certain spiritual components must be included in the daily household routine. In the left-hand path of tantra there are five ideas or sadhanas: *matsya*, symbolized by fish, *mamsa*, by meat, *madya*, by wine, *mudra*, by grain, and *maithuna*, by sex. People believe that because tantra says fish, meat, wine, sex and grain can be used for spiritual upliftment, there is nothing wrong in indulging in

them. However, this is a simplistic, literal interpretation. These concepts are defined and enlarged upon in the tantric texts.

Kularnava Tantra, the most authentic text on tantra, explains the symbology of these five sadhanas. It says that if by eating fish or meat, or by drinking wine, or having sex, it was possible to be enlightened, then anybody who indulges in these practices would be naturally enlightened and there would be no need for spiritual teaching. Tantra does not consider anything as sinful or profane for everything we are experiencing is only a product of this life. Human beings have the potential to enrich the environment and the place where they live. The idea of sin has been handed down through religious conditionings, but it is not a tantric idea.

Sexuality has three purposes: pleasure, progeny and sublimation. When a relationship is based on infatuation and passion, it will dissolve when the passions fluctuate and change direction. When a relationship remains physical rather than mental or spiritual, tantra cannot be achieved. Physical identification means everything is identified for the pleasure of the body, senses and mind. According to the left-hand path of tantra one can lead a normal family, social and sexual life, knowing that pleasure or progeny is not the aim of the interaction or relationship, but sublimation and cultivation of the qualities of consciousness and heart. Tantra says that in order to overcome negative sexuality, one has to cultivate love, which is a heart feeling, not passion, which is a mental feeling. In order to sublimate the energy, the flow of energy during the sexual act has to be reversed, so instead of being discharged and wasted, the energy is raised from mooladhara up to sahasrara through ajna and concentrated there. When sexual energy comes up to the higher centres, the doors of spiritual realization open up. This instinct is managed at mooladhara level.

At the next level, swadhisthana chakra, the seat of the crescent moon and the water element, representing the mind, fear and insecurity, manifests. They are the only states that can disturb the natural harmony of the mind, as the roots are deeply ingrained in our personality. Thus they have a deeper

effect on the behaviour, personality and the mind compared to other negative emotions such as anxiety and aggression. The major fear is being uprooted from our comfort zone, in relation to our profession, family, personal life, emotional life, social life, and so on. In the left-hand path of tantra, in the second stage one has to confront and discover one's fears. Tantra has intense sadhanas which bring us face to face with our inner fears and insecurities, and we emerge a stronger, balanced person, master of our life.

The third instinct is craving, desiring. We function because of the strength we receive from our desires and aspirations, which may not necessarily be our needs. They can be managed by following a meditative path of self-observation, *swadhyaya*. The centre of craving and desire is manipura chakra, where everything is taken in, burned and distributed. Through swadhyaya practices such as the SWAN theory and antar mouna, the behavioural and mental patterns can be understood, guided, controlled and pacified.

The fourth instinct is sleep, a passive or tranquil state of existence, without any mental or emotional upheaval.

Tantra manages these four basic instincts by cultivating awareness and finding a balance in the normal routine, so we can live healthy and happy lives.

Understanding tantric principles

Book-educated neo-tantrics take the practices too literally, whereas an enlightened tantric understands mystical tantra as it relates to our life. In tantra, consuming fish means perfection of pranayama. The two fish which have to be consumed refer to the flows of air in the nostrils. Consumption of wine means perfection of khechari mudra through which the life-giving nectar or *amrit*, the result of a hormonal secretion, is retained on the tongue instead of being burnt. Consumption of meat means perfection and purification of *annamaya kosha*, the meat body, attained through hatha yoga. Consuming grain means being able to manage the vrittis. Maithuna indicates union of the twin forces, positive and negative, within oneself, raising the kundalini and uniting with Shiva

in sahasrara. These tantric principles can be incorporated into one's family life to regulate and guide the relationships and attitudes being cultivated at home. However, the crux of tantric philosophy is acceptance of life as it is now. This is the left-hand path of tantra.

Living consciously

Change, transformation and transition are the eternal laws of life. Tantra is not a practice, ritual or ceremony, but a lifestyle that one lives consciously to progress and improve the quality of life and to develop awareness of shakti. In the yogic and tantric tradition, shakti is called yogamaya. *Yoga* means union, *maya* means separation. Yoga represents unity, maya signifies duality. Maya is flowing away from the source. Yoga is flowing back to the source. Tantra is like the salmon swimming upstream against the current towards its birthplace. So in an unreal or ever-changing world, there is a search for reality. Being influenced by change is the realm of maya, the manifest nature. Trying to find a stable base where we can be unaffected by the changes around us is yoga. Therefore, shakti always has a dual role: to take one away from the source and to bring one back to the source.

Normally we move with the current into the world without awareness. Reversal of shakti can happen by consciously directing our efforts to experience union, to understand inner experiences. Then the flow of energy is endless. The entire tantric system and the yogic system is a process of rediscovering that unifying energy and strength. Therefore, tantra and yoga should be seen as a lifestyle where we are fine-tuning and adjusting our life to attain maximum harmony and balance.

When there is a conscious effort to discover ourselves, we encounter peace, happiness and tranquillity and we become that in the course of time. Tantra has one condition, which is being sincere and not duping ourselves. Perfection of yoga is a prerequisite before attempting perfection in tantra. Yoga is preparing the ground, and tantra is the flowering of the seed. Therefore, first we need to perfect yoga and then to understand and walk the path of tantra.

Satsang on Mind and Emotions

Strunjan, Slovenia, 18–20 May 2008

How can emotional detachment be achieved?

There is no need to detach yourself emotionally from anything. There is the emotion that recognized a specific quality which has attracted you to another person. However, self-oriented possessive and destructive associations with emotions should be removed from the sentiment of the emotion. You should also enlarge the scope of emotional attachment. Instead of you be attached to ten, attach yourself to a hundred, instead of a hundred attach yourself to a thousand. In this way, you will slightly dilute the attachment. If I add five drops of black ink to a cup of water and the water becomes black, how do I make it transparent again? Put the cup of water in a bucket of water where it will mix with the larger quantity of clear water and the blackness will dissolve.

One reason for attachment is that you begin to see yourself in the other person and you get attached to yourself in the other person, but you remain totally detached from someone in whom you don't see yourself. When you begin to see yourself in others, the identity of 'me and mine' develops. You identify with your son, your daughter, your husband, your wife, your friend, your associates for they are all connected to you personally. Therefore, according to the spiritual precepts of the East if you love your son or daughter as one person, extend that love to others who have no one to call their own.

Sri Swamiji has given a simple solution to this problem. He says that when you go shopping for shoes or clothes for

your three children, buy two other sets for two unknown children. Give the extra ones to those for whom such things are not possible. In that way you will share your emotional attachment with those who have no resources. In the course of time, you will begin to think about the two unknown children you have adopted and who are receiving the opportunity to grow and develop in life. You will be sharing that emotional attachment with total strangers, which means there will be more fulfilment and satisfaction.

Therefore, do not go for detachment, but for refining the attachment and giving it a purpose. There is greater joy in attachment if it has a positive purpose behind it. Attachment is dry. Don't attach yourself to 'me and mine'. Love, compassion and affection have to develop with total strangers, then it is real. It can happen with those who are your own at any time, but it is not real. Love, compassion and sympathy do not flower with your own family. It always happens with strangers and that is real love. That love and compassion is an act of reaching out with the purpose of encouraging the growth of another person without the expectation of receiving something back.

How to manage and control anger and envy?

The antidote to anger is love and the antidote to envy is understanding, so cultivate these two qualities in your life.

Why are there so many gurus from India? Do gurus come from other countries too?

This is an interesting question and the answer is equally interesting. Different kinds of trees grow at different heights. What grows on the plains does not necessarily grow in the mountains and what grows in high altitudes does not grow in low altitudes. Similarly, climate and weather plays an important role in deciding what kind of growth will take place. You can't grow mangoes in Finland and in India we can't grow the ice apples of Finland. The Indian environment is appropriate for the fruiting of gurus. The culture, the society, the belief systems, the mentality have all supported

a search to discover the underlying reality. When you talk to God, that is called prayer, but when God talks to you, it is called schizophrenia. In India they realize that it is not schizophrenia, but the other way around. So we accepted such people and realized that they had some qualitative stuff to talk about. Therefore, the fruiting of gurus is easier in India, the climate is right, the soil is right and the seeds are right.

Can you please tell the SOS techniques for moments of stress in a busy management world?

The simplest form of yoga practice in a busy moment is breath awareness. When you are sitting at your table, writing, reading, talking to somebody, just give your attention to your breathing, connect to your breath and take long, deep breaths. Release the stress in the abdomen and you will find that you are able to manage your stress in a better way. Whenever one is under stress, three areas of the body tense up and become tight. They are the neck muscles, the abdominal muscles and the lower perineal muscles. When you take long, deep breaths and try to relax the stress of the muscles, then you achieve relaxation faster.

How can we know that the sadhana we practise is the right one?

I don't know what sadhana you practise, but I can tell you an ideal sadhana. In the morning when you wake up the first thing you should do is chant the Mahamrityunjaya mantra and the Gayatri mantra eleven times each. In that subconscious half-awake, half-asleep state of mind, these mantras will enter as a sankalpa for health and wisdom. It is a good way to start the day, with a positive affirmation, a sankalpa for health, wellbeing and wisdom. Afterwards, when you have freshened up, practise five asanas: *tadasana*, *tiryak tadasana*, *kati chakrasana*, *surya namaskara* and one inverted posture, *sarvangasana*. It will take fifteen minutes. Two pranayama practices are more than enough, *nadi shodhana*, alternate nostril deep breathing, and *bhramari*, humming bee breath. Seven rounds of each pranayama will take ten minutes.

In the evening or in the afternoon when you feel stressed out or tired, practise yoga nidra instead of a siesta. At night, before sleeping, practise ten minutes mantra meditation. This is the ideal yoga sadhana spread throughout the day. It will become a habit and you will enjoy the experience as part of your lifestyle.

Is it the mind that produces disease?

The mind is one factor that alters the harmony of the body. When we are depressed, angry, happy, joyous, introverted or extroverted, the mental mood influences the physical behaviour. A depressive mood affects the vitality, dynamism and stamina of the body. A negative mind can create illnesses, diseases and imbalances. The mind is good at imagining things which have never existed. If two people happen to be talking and smile at each other, you will begin to think they are smiling at you or making fun of you. The mind always imagines a threat, which takes the form of a visualization, a belief and an understanding. The mood also changes the chemicals and hormones in the body. Therefore, yoga has always stated that one should maintain positivity and protect it from negative influences.

Just as we protect our garden from rodents and insects, we have to protect the good we are trying to cultivate in our life from the destructive negative influences which surround us. We have to remember to be very observant about the negative things in life. One rotten apple can spoil the whole basket of apples, but one good apple cannot rectify one rotten apple. Therefore, we always have to be observant about negative, detrimental influences and try to maintain optimism and positivity, and know and learn all the time. We should not worry about mistakes, everybody makes them. People who do not make mistakes have never tried anything new. People who make mistakes always try new things.

Another problem is that when we make mistakes, we stop ourselves, and that should not happen. When children are learning to walk, they take a few steps, fall down, get up again, walk a few steps and again fall, but they do not stop getting

up. So learn from the child inside you how to stumble and fall and again get up smiling, with vision, determination and the conviction that one day you will walk upright. The day you can do that, you will have perfected tantra and yoga in your life.

What is success in yoga?

You have to make yoga a part of your lifestyle, not a ten minute practice every morning. In reality that is how you have to look at yoga. In the final analysis what do you expect from yoga? You can say that you want the ability to excel in whatever you do. If you meditate, you have to excel in the process of meditation. If you practise asana and pranayama, you have to excel in it. If you practise karma yoga, you should excel in karma yoga. When you experience love, excel in love. When there is passion, excel in passion. When you are alone, excel in solitude.

The ultimate expression of life happens only when you excel in each area of your participation and involvement. In the final analysis it is excellence in living that we acquire through yoga. Excelling each day and each moment is known as success. Success does not mean winning or coming first. It means becoming better every time in what you do. If you are able to live in a better way tomorrow than how you lived today, you are a success. So every day try to live better than the day before and you will succeed every day and never know failure in work, relationships, profession or personal life. That is the definition of success.

Yoga and Stress Management

Brijuni, Croatia, 20–21 May 2008

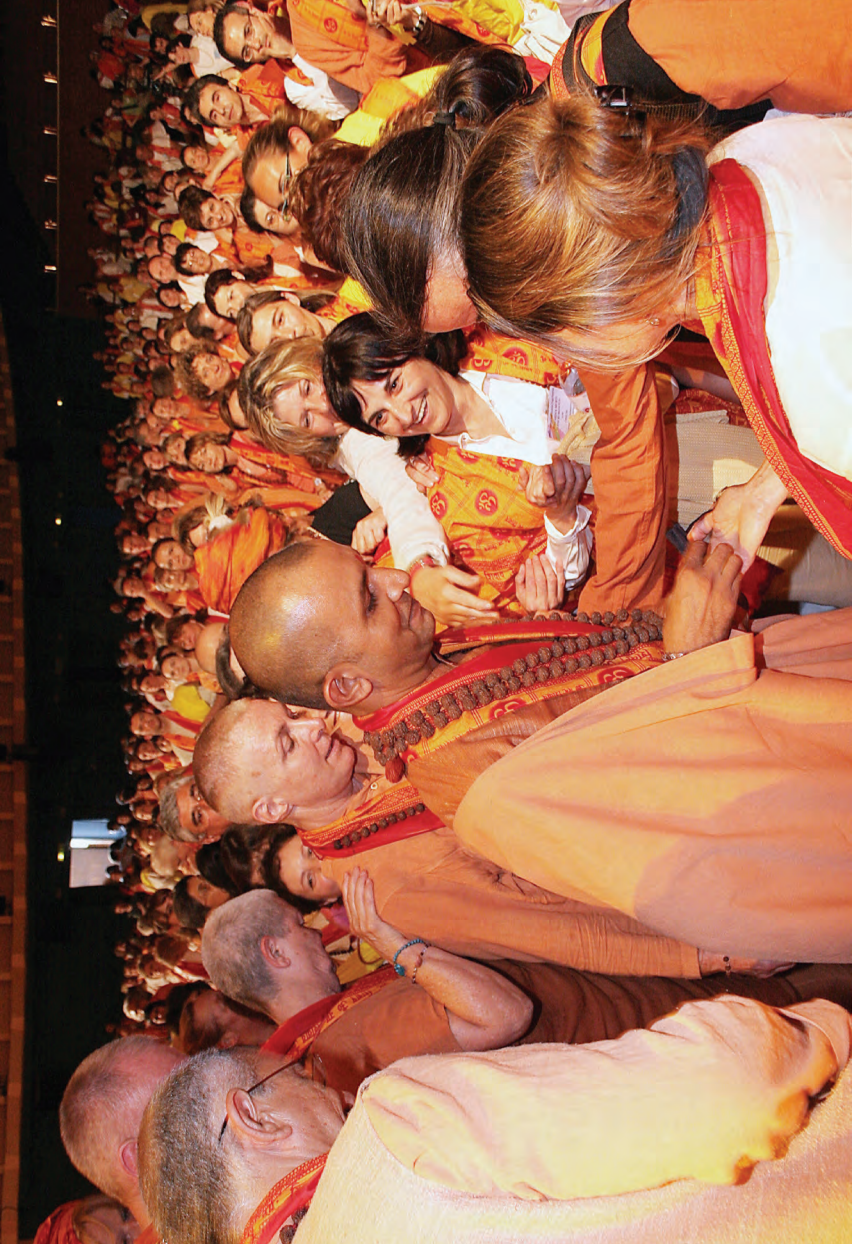
How can yoga manage physiological, psychological, professional and environmental stress? Stress disturbs the whole personality, body, mind and emotions, and causes imbalances, illnesses and diseases. Yoga has always believed that it is possible to deal with stress through practice and effort to acquire personal peace and harmony. People who have adopted the wide variety of practices available in yoga have experienced the wonders they can work if practised in the right manner.

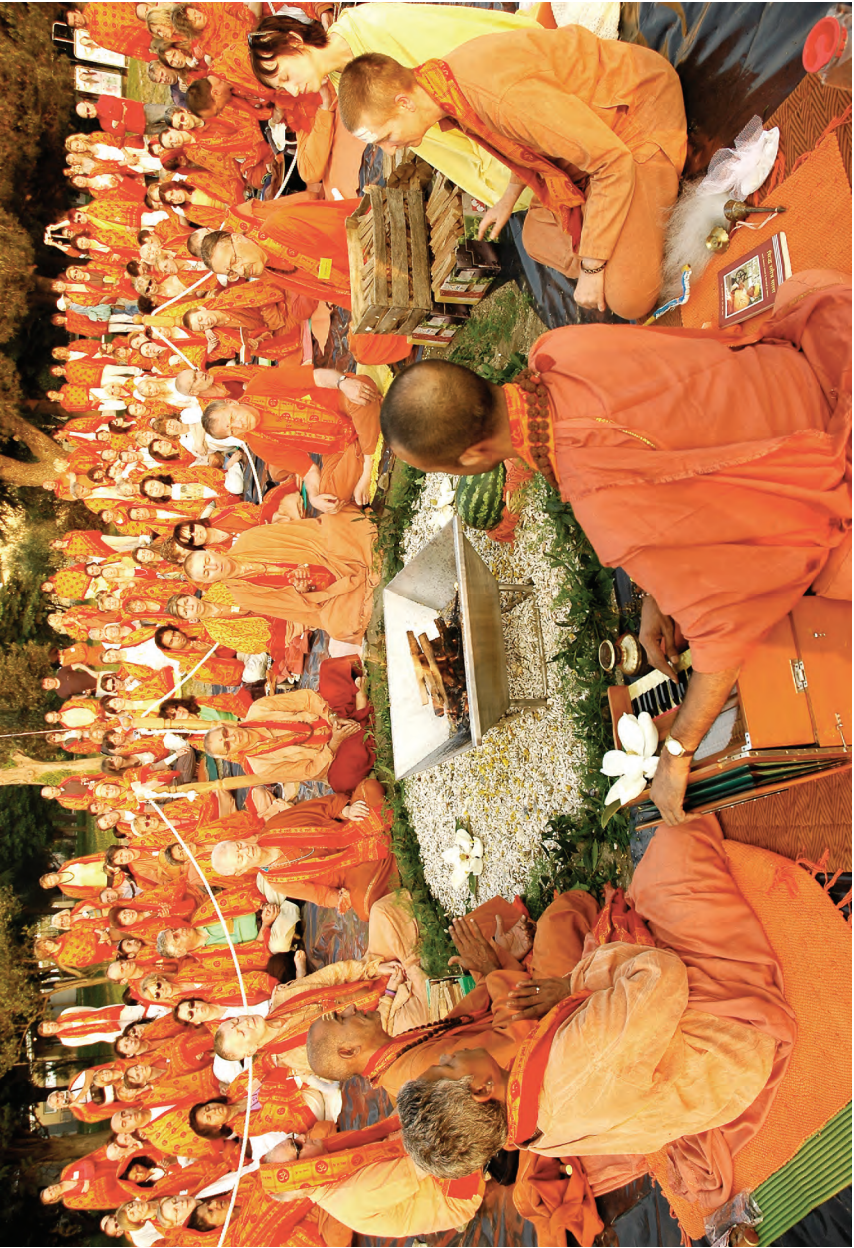
Yoga is a common word, practice and philosophy today, but despite its widespread use, understanding of yoga is confined to hatha yoga. However, the physical aspect is not the beginning or end of yoga. Yoga is concerned not with one aspect of life but the total experience of living. We are able to incorporate and practise the physical, mental, emotional and meditative components of yoga to overcome anxiety and stress. We are also able to increase our strengths and energies to smoothen the passage of life.

Although people believe yoga is the path of self-realization, this is not the only aim of yoga. The first benefit of yoga is acquiring skills to live harmoniously. Being able to manage the upheavals of the mind, the psychological, mental, emotional disturbances and distractions, is the second aspiration of yoga. The third purpose is cultivating what is positive and optimistic in life. The fourth aim is acquiring perfection and excellence. Realization is a spontaneous and natural outcome of these four changes.

















When stress becomes distress

Without stress, we would not be able to survive and function in the world. In reality, stress is like adding a pinch of salt to food to give it taste. When stress becomes unmanageable, it becomes distress, so rather than stress management, it is managing distress that is the problem. Stress is not negative; it is an important component of our existence. Even cavemen had stress, hunting wild animals and not knowing what calamities would befall them. Stress took birth with life and that is the reality. We have survived so long and continue to progress due to stress. If a bow string is loose, an arrow will have no force, and if the string is too tight, it will snap. The bow needs to have the correct tension. That is the amount of tension we need in our life. If there is too much stress and the bow breaks, it is dangerous. When the bow is about to break, stress becomes the cause of physical, psychological or emotional distress. How to find perfect balance and harmony is the direction and aspiration of yoga.

Understanding yoga

Although it has an ancient history, the understanding of yoga in the modern world is only about forty years old. Today yoga is seen as a physical practice to attain physical or psychological benefits, or to have a spiritual experience. Both concepts are incorrect. Yoga is not physical exercise, nor is yoga the way to attain realization. Yoga is a process of attaining balance, harmony and excellence. The word *yoga* means union. People think that yoga is union of the individual soul with the cosmic soul, yet that is a philosophical understanding. Through practice and application, an understanding evolves which is not philosophical, but a practical realization of how to attain physical wellbeing, mental balance, emotional harmony and spiritual awareness, which represent the culmination of yoga.

Swami Sivananda was a medical doctor, who renounced his practice to become a sannyasin. Sannyasins belong to a tradition of renunciates who pledge themselves to the welfare of humanity, using the skills the tradition has given them to improve the quality of body, mind and life. With his

medical background, Swami Sivananda realized that yoga was a practical process whose benefits could be experienced physically and psychologically. He inspired hundreds of yoga teachers and disciples around the world to propagate yoga. Many became the first yoga teachers to leave the shores of India and go to the West in the early 1960s. Prior to that, there was a basic understanding of yoga in the West as an eastern mystical subject. Now yoga has become a household word.

Swami Satyananda, my guru, was a disciple of Swami Sivananda. He took it upon himself to make yoga accessible to different strata and levels of society. While many yoga teachers and masters in India and around the world were teaching the physical practices of yoga, guiding people in the spiritual aspects of yoga in small groups and centres in various cities, Swami Satyananda's work spread into applying yoga in society.

Today yoga is being taught in hospitals, medical colleges, prisons and schools, applied in industries, studied in universities and practised in armies. Astronauts have practised yoga for its effects on zero gravity. We have found a new awareness developing in these fields with the practice of yoga. With the correct understanding yoga can be applied and is being applied in many different areas: therapy, academia, family and social. Satyananda Yoga has been in the forefront of such applications. In India, Swami Satyananda established the mother centre, the Bihar School of Yoga, and the Yoga Research Foundation to conduct medical and scientific research in yoga

Yoga Sutras

The tradition says that yoga is a lifestyle, not a practice. Today people view yoga as a practice, but it is a lifestyle according to the principles of yoga. This becomes apparent when we study the yogic literatures. One of the traditional and classical literatures of yoga is the *Yoga Sutras*, which define the process of yoga. About six thousand years ago, a sannyasin named Patanjali was asked to define yoga. His answer was that yoga is a form of discipline. He was then asked what the outcome was of acquiring yogic discipline. His answer was that the practitioner will be able to manage the fluctuations of the

mind in a better way. He was then asked a third question: What is the outcome of having controlled the fluctuations of the mind? His answer was that with a controlled mind one is able to realize one's inner nature. These are the three opening statements of Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. Nowhere has the word self-realization been used. It says simply that yoga is a discipline by which one can channel the fluctuations of the mind and then realize one's own nature. If we look at these three statements, we find that the indirect approach of yoga is mind management.

The *Yoga Sutras* define eight stages of yoga, which are grouped in twos. The first two stages are *yama* and *niyama*, modes of conduct and discipline. The yamas and niyamas deal with behaviour modification. When our expressions, attitudes and behaviour are in harmony and there are no destructive traits emerging, we move to the next group, which is *asana* and *pranayama*, physical practices and breathing practices. The first two stages of yoga deal with behaviour modification, the third and fourth stages with the attainment of physical wellbeing, the fifth and sixth with managing the expressions and fluctuations of the mind, and the seventh and eighth with the cultivation of spiritual qualities. We see behaviour modification, attaining physical health, acquiring the ability to relax, concentrate and let go of accumulated stresses and tensions, and we see the possibility of cultivating spiritual strengths.

Positive qualities

There is a big difference between spiritual precepts and religious precepts. Religious precepts represent a system of belief and experience of a transcendental nature, but spirituality seeks the cultivation of the good and the beautiful. Just as health is important for the body, spirituality is important for the mind and for life. We have to manage illnesses and diseases, like asthma and diabetes, to become free from their negative, destructive influences and acquire health. Similarly, there are also illnesses and diseases of the mind, such as fear, insecurity, jealousy, envy, hatred and anger, which have to be managed because they cause distress, pain and suffering.

Managing these mental illnesses leads to harmony and peace. Managing physical illnesses leads to physical health and wellbeing. The moment we are able to manage these mental expressions in a better way, the creative and constructive faculties evolve. We become more sensitive to our needs and the needs of the environment, we begin to connect with the people around us and with our environment in a better way, and positive qualities come into existence.

Evolution of consciousness

Yoga says that we are all passing through different stages of evolution. Evolution is maturity of consciousness. As children are educated, mature and grow up, their thinking, behaviour and attitudes change. Similarly, consciousness, mind, also matures over time. Positive maturity of consciousness is known as evolution. Negative and destructive evolution of consciousness is known as involution. We like to think that we are evolving, but are we really? We tend to identify more with the negative and destructive, which brings out the worst from within. How can that be called evolution? Evolution represents the generation and expression of what is positive, beautiful, constructive and uplifting. Therefore, we have to rethink our definition of evolution from the personal and scientific perspective.

Yoga and tantra both say that life is expression of the interaction between consciousness and energy. When we come into this life, consciousness and energy become conditioned. Consciousness, the mind, is conditioned by society, family, culture, environment and other influences in the world, which direct our mind outwards. We have acquired many skills to excel in our profession, but we have not acquired the understanding of how to deal with our mind. All forms of education help us acquire greater skills, but all the professions in which we are involved direct our effort and attention outside, outwards.

Learning to relax

Many people fear being alone for five minutes for then they have to look at themselves. Sitting quietly for five minutes is

difficult. There is always some desire, some need to move, to act, to talk, to see. There will always be a need to engage the mind and even one minute of silence becomes an impossible feat. That is a habit of mind. It is how you have trained yourself. You have trained yourselves in activity and when you follow the path of constant activity, it is natural that stress will become distress. However, if you acquire the ability to relax and observe yourself for ten minutes, your stress level will be better managed. Therefore, the yogic process begins not with the body or asana or pranayama, but by learning how to relax.

Asana and pranayama are physical practices which attract us, but so do other forms of exercise such as aerobics, jogging or cycling. If yoga practices such as asana or pranayama become physical exercises, then where is the relevance of the spiritual component in our life? Therefore, in our tradition, yoga begins with learning how to relax. Relaxation is a very important aspect of one's life. Tranquillizers and sleeping pills outnumber other medicines, indicating that people have forgotten how to relax and sleep. Imagine their state of mind. We are losing contact with our inner self. We are losing the ability to relax, to concentrate and become one-pointed.

The choice is yours, whether you want to become self-realized or to learn how to sleep. Sleep indicates that you can control and master your life, but relaxation does not mean sleep. Relaxation means being able to disconnect from stressful situations. When you sleep at night, you are disconnected from the world, from worries, stresses and tensions, from society, family and friends. Stress is becoming a silent killer. However, rather than stress, we are concerned with the state of distress that comes after stress, which destroys our tranquillity and harmony.

To tune a guitar each string needs to be tightened. If the string is loose, no sound will come and if the string is too tight, it will break. There has to be just the right amount of tension in the string. The same principle applies in our life too. Finely tuned stress will give birth to creativity and motivation, but if there is too much stress, the string will become too tight and break. Breaking the harmonious state

of stress is the cause of distress. Stress is not bad because it brings forth human creativity and activity. Stress encourages human beings to participate in their environment and society. We have to become aware of the areas in our life where stress is experienced and learn how to manage them.

Mantra for psychological relaxation

Mantra is most important to manage stress. Mantra deals with psychological stress and relaxation. When the mind and energies become dissipated, there is no focus and it is difficult to bring the mind back to the state of relaxation and concentration. This kind of stress is caused when the mind becomes tired, when a restful mind has become a disturbed mind. Therefore, we need to learn how to relax. Psychological relaxation comes with the practice of mantra, not by sleeping. Mantra is the beginning of yoga in our life, the first step.

Mantra is a collection of vibrations, sounds and sound frequencies. Our entire body is vibrating and pulsating at a certain frequency. What we perceive as solid matter in reality is not solid. Metal and wood are not really solid. Our body is not solid. It feels and looks solid, but deep inside, each atom has a nucleus of energy vibrating and pulsating, around which other protons and neutrons revolve. Their compression in the body gives the experience of solidity, but if they disperse, the body is nothing but energy.

The body is made up of energy. These energies within the body, within the mental structure, pulsate at a certain frequency in which a sound, a vibration is created. If we move our hand in the air, we don't hear anything, for the sound being created is at a much lower frequency than we are used to. In every movement and activity, a sound, a vibration is created. Yoga says that if you can manage the dissipated energies of the body, you are able to relax and harmonize these different energies. Mantra is a collection of different sounds corresponding to different frequency ranges in the body. When we chant the mantra verbally or mentally, we are creating a specific environment within where we are able to access the vibratory dimension of our life. Kirtan is

a collection of dynamic mantras that stimulate the nervous system. Mantras are also meditative by nature.

The literal meaning of the word *mantra* is the power that frees the mind from its obsessive, dissipated nature. Mantras are used more in meditation to internalize the awareness, to become aware of those areas of the mind which experience stress, to relax them and allow them to regain their original strength. So when we repeat, chant and practise mantra, the first effect is relaxation, the second effect is internalization of awareness and the third effect is developing the capacity to observe ourselves, to sensitize ourselves to the vibrations created by the mantra, and by focusing on the vibration to harmonize our personality and nature.

Ajapa japa

The practice of mantra is simple. Connect the mantra with the breathing process. While breathing normally and naturally, with each inhalation and exhalation mentally repeat the mantra without changing the rhythm or speed of the breathing. In yoga there is a meditation called *ajapa japa*, spontaneous repetition of mantra with the breath. It is one of the most effective tools to manage stress. This mantra meditation can be practised while sitting in a chair, lying on a bed, sitting on the floor, in any comfortable posture. The initial stage is developing awareness of the flow of the natural breath in the nostrils, observing the natural incoming and outgoing breath, feeling the cool sensation during inhalation and the warm sensation during exhalation. Doing this for five minutes will give the experience of deep relaxation. You will find your body, mind and emotions relaxing. According to yoga, relaxation is focusing the energies and consciousness, whereas tension is dissipation of energies and consciousness.

In the next stage we begin to experience the flow of the breath in the front of the body, imagining that there is a transparent tube extending from the navel to the eyebrow centre. The breath is visualized coming up inside the transparent tube from the navel to the eyebrow centre during inhalation and on exhalation going down the transparent

tube. Inhalation and exhalation are lengthened, as the natural breath will be too short to develop awareness of the movement. The breaths have to be slow, long and deep, without straining or breathing too slow or too fast. Inhalation and exhalation have to be comfortable, as you might be breathing in for five or seven seconds and breathing out for five or seven seconds. The length of inhalation and exhalation has to become equal. Initially, work on visualizing the psychic passage and seeing the breath ascending and descending. Regulate the incoming and the outgoing breath by counting from one to five.

In the next stage mantra is added to the breath, *So* with inhalation, *Ham* with exhalation. When breathing in, mentally say the mantra *So* and as you exhale, mentally repeat the mantra *Ham*. As the breath ascends from the navel to the eyebrow centre, mentally repeat the mantra *So*, and as the breath descends from the eyebrow centre to the navel, mentally repeat the mantra *Ham*. Be aware of the movement of the mantra with the ascending and descending breath.

Ajapa japa, continuous and ongoing repetition of the mantra with the breath, is the simplest form of mantra meditation. This practice helps to eliminate the mental and psychological stresses we are unable to manage. It should be performed at night for ten minutes before going to bed. During the practice, just be centred in your experience within the body and in the mind. For those ten minutes, the outside world, society, family and friends do not exist. Twenty-three hours and fifty minutes of your time is for the world, profession, family and society. Spend the remaining ten minutes on your personal development, to cultivate a positive, relaxed, peaceful attitude of mind. It will be time worth investing.

Mantra is the power, the force which allows you to focus yourself, to bring awareness back to yourself. Mantra practice allows you to release the stresses accumulated over time and gives you the ability to relax more. When you are mentally exhausted, intellectually exhausted, emotionally exhausted, mantra is a good stimulation. Mantra harmonizes and stimulates the psychic system, so there is greater harmony

and coordination between body, mind, emotions and spirit. Mantra is the first component of stress management.

Releasing physical stress with asanas

The second aspect is the accumulation of stress in the nerves, muscles, bones and joints. Certain areas in the body accumulate a lot of stress. Three major areas of stress are the upper part of the neck and shoulders, the waist, lower back or abdominal region and the perineum. Whenever you feel tension or stress, observe your body and you will discover that one of these three areas has become tight. You begin to contract those muscles and compression takes place in the nerves and joint areas, leading to stiffness. Massage always feels good in the upper shoulder region and the waist region, because these are the areas affected by tensions and stress. When stress accumulates in the shoulder and neck region, spondylitis can develop. Tension headaches may develop. The eyes may become blurry. The sensory faculties seem to reduce their activity when there is tension.

When there is stress in the waist and lower back region, digestion is affected, circulation is affected, the upper part of the legs feel tired and the lower back becomes tight. If it persists, then sometimes we suffer from sciatica or slipped disc or lower back problems. The lower part of the spine needs to be looked after because the spinal cord is the pillar of the body. When you are sitting bent forward, in a compressed manner, the pillar of the body is curved, creating pressure in different areas of the spine, but if you are sitting straight, the pressure is equally distributed. Maintaining the lower back is important in yoga to release pressure from the waist and abdominal region and to improve vitality.

For the removal of muscular stress, circulatory stress, nervous stress, and skeletal stress in the bones and joints, certain asanas or postures are useful. The first practice to eliminate stress from the body is *tadasana*, the palm tree pose. This practice gives traction because it opens up all the joints of the spine, legs, arms and shoulders, removing the pressure from each of the vertebra that happens naturally when we spend a lot of time sitting down. Tadasana stretches the lower

back and shoulders, and is a good practice to remove stress from the cervical, thoracic, lumbar and sacral regions.

The second practice is *tiryak tadasana*, swaying palm tree pose, which gives a lateral stretch. Bending to the side compresses one side of the body and expands the muscles on the other side. We undergo compression and expansion and the stretch is felt through the legs, up along the side of the body to the arms. This posture can help to relieve slipped disc and sciatica. The third practice is *kati chakrasana*, waist rotating pose, which has a squeezing, twisting effect on the body. When a cloth is wet, we squeeze the water out. Similarly, here the body is being twisted to remove stagnant blood from muscles that are rarely used.

These three practices are beneficial to manage physiological, muscular, nervous stresses accumulated in the shoulders and lower back region. Rotating the hips clockwise and anticlockwise is also a good practice for the waist region, especially for people who sit a lot, drive a lot, or study a lot. By doing these practices, we can definitely avoid accumulating stress in the body. The body will feel lighter and have more stamina, dynamism and energy. These practices can be done three times a day: in the morning to free the body from the stiffness of the night; before lunch, to relieve the body of the burden accumulated during the morning, and at night before going to sleep, to again relieve the body of the burden accumulated during the afternoon.

These three asanas can be done anywhere during the day. You don't have to join a yoga class to practise yoga. You can join a yoga class to learn yoga, but then you have to apply the practices in your normal routine and environment. It is no use accumulating stress for twenty-four hours and then going to a yoga class for half an hour to release it. Don't wait for the next day, maybe it will be too late. Try to manage your physical and mental condition as soon as you experience any accumulation of stress.

If you can do these three or four simple practices, you will discover that you are able to breathe better as you are opening up the chest and lungs, so there is better absorption of oxygen

and a feeling of lightness. The circulation improves for you are removing stagnant blood from the body and using muscles rarely used in normal daily activities. You are improving your digestion and excretion, and balancing any imbalances in mucus, bile and wind. If you practise these postures regularly, you will begin to experience positive health. Positive health means everything is properly balanced.

Managing mental stress with pranayama

Cerebral or mental stress can be managed by practising breathing techniques. Students experience mental stress at exam times. Cerebral tension becomes more intense when one is involved in an activity demanding concentration. That stress is not emotional, not even intellectual, it is cerebral. Children study at night to prepare for exams and when they wake up they discover they have forgotten everything. Then a panic attack follows. That is cerebral stress.

One breathing technique to manage cerebral stress is *bhramari pranayama*, the humming bee breath. It is simple. You create a humming sound, blocking out the external sounds by plugging the ears with the index fingers. The vibration of the humming sound is felt in the centre of the head and can be felt spreading throughout the whole body.

Nervous relaxation is important in yoga as nervous tension is a major problem. Hyperactivity of the sympathetic nervous system and imbalance of the parasympathetic nervous system are conditions that we expose ourselves to every moment. To remove nervous tension, there is *nadi shodhana pranayama*, alternate nostril breathing. It can be done as a practice and also mentally by visualizing and imagining that you are breathing in through the right nostril, breathing out through the left nostril, then breathing in through the left nostril and breathing out through the right nostril.

Once I was on a flight from Colombia to Guatemala. The plane landed in Panama where there was social disturbance. The passengers had to get off the plane. Our passports and documents were taken, so everyone was nervous. People were chain smoking and trembling with fear. Their faces showed

the signs of distress, fear and anxiety. Some people asked me, “Aren’t you feeling nervous? Don’t you feel frightened?” I said, “No, the situation is beyond my control. Worrying about it will not help, so why not enjoy a balanced mind rather than the agonies of a frustrated, anxious, nervous mind.” I spent the time observing my breath as there was nothing else to do, and it maintained my state of relaxation. Simply visualizing the breath moving in alternate nostrils is valuable for managing any kind of nervous tension.

Nadi shodhana is practised by placing the index and middle fingers at the eyebrow centre, the point where awareness is held during the practice. Close the right nostril with the thumb, inhale through the left nostril deeply and slowly, close the left nostril with the ring finger, open the right nostril and breathe out slowly through the right. Again inhale through the right nostril and breathe out through the left nostril. That is one cycle. If you can practise ten cycles, you will be in much better control of your nerves and better equipped to avoid nervous tension.

Nadi shodhana pranayama can be done at home, but at work, at school, at college, or in places where there are too many people, simply practise mental pranayama. Imagine that the breath is coming in through one nostril, and out through the other. These are some of the simple techniques of yoga which, if you can incorporate them in your daily life, will make confronting and accepting life easier. They will give you a different understanding of your interactions with your environment, your profession and family.

Managing emotional tension with meditation

Emotional tension is always associated with a bad experience in a person’s love life, family life or professional life. Family pressures, trying to manage ambitions and fulfil expectations can become the cause of emotional agony from time to time. By learning how to manage distressing situations, a reality can be created where instead of having to go through the agony and confusion of managing negative situations, one can enjoy the positive.

Emotional tension can be managed effectively through the practices of meditation. There is one specific meditation called *hridayakasha dharana*, concentration on the space of the heart. The heart is the centre of all emotional expressions. Emotions express energy in motion. Head, heart and hands are the three areas of expression in human life. You are a combination of the faculties of head or intellect, heart or emotions, and hands or performance. To regulate and increase the harmony between head, heart and hands, meditation is a must.

The purpose of meditation is not experiencing the divine and transcendental. Meditation is a way to explore your personality and nature. A car can take you on a long journey or around the block. Meditation also has this double purpose; you can go on a long journey and you can also go around your own block. Those people who attempt a long journey become the yogis who adopt yoga in their life. Those who attempt short journeys are normal people trying to gain some understanding of their own life. Therefore, remember that meditation does not represent the long journey in life. Meditation begins with short journeys around your own life to become familiar with the process, the practice and your own experience.

In *hridayakasha dharana* you will be able to observe your emotions, the passionate involvement with emotions, the obsessive involvement with life, and see those areas of your life where emotional stress is accumulated. You will develop the ability to eliminate those stresses, not by getting involved with emotions, but by observing them. This is a skill which has to be cultivated; it is not something that will happen naturally and spontaneously. Meditation is an attempt to explore your character. Meditation has been used as a tool throughout history, by different cultures, to develop inner sensitivity and to manage emotional influences.

Yoga is more practical than philosophical. Philosophies of yoga come from those who are trying to clarify their thoughts and ideas. The practicalities of yoga are taught by those who know that yoga can be applied to improve the quality of expression, behaviour, mentality and character.

Satsang on the Application of Yoga

Brijuni, Croatia, 20–21 May 2008

Can stress be the cause of overeating and eating sweets?

There are three things involved here. One is to like, one is stress and the other is the character. So you decide whether it is in your character to eat, or whether you just like to eat, or whether you eat because of stress. Whatever you discover, try to balance it, and you'll be all right.

When initiated, how can a disciple receive guidance and be sure that he properly understood it?

Initiation is a connection with the guru, and this connection becomes stronger with mantra sadhana. As you progress in your mantra sadhana, you will receive certain inspirations. It may come from the depth of your pure heart. Guru represents the purity of your inner self, the sincerity and commitment that you have taken on yourself to discover something from yourself, within yourself. If you are committed, sincere, dedicated to yourself and to your aspirations and you strive purposefully to attain harmony and develop creativity, then certain flashes of inspiration will come. These inspirations guide you on the path of truth, justice and righteousness.

Fulfilling these actions will give you a sense of greater joy and happiness. Life becomes more colourful, the sun becomes full of light, the green of the trees is brighter, the water in a spring becomes crystal clear, the perception changes. To realize whether it is your connection with the guru, you have to do two things. First, be in contact with

your community, the centre, the teacher, with the tradition, because through these people and places you will receive inspiration, encouragement and guidance. Secondly, you will be able to experience the transformation within yourself by following the practices, specifically those of mantra, pranayama, asana, meditation and yoga nidra, and you will discover a gradual change and transformation happening within yourself. You will be in touch with your inner harmony and inner strength. Two things are necessary to regulate your life: contact with the centre, the teacher, the tradition and regular practice.

I would like to know why I am having this life at this time and at this place. I am also wondering why you are here. I know why I am here, but I am wondering why you are here.

There are certain questions one can talk about as much as one wants. You can create an intricate philosophy or a simple belief. I am for a simple belief. I am here, therefore, I enjoy it. Let me mature, let me grow, let me experience wellbeing, let me participate in life wholeheartedly, always looking forward to the next step I will take, not worrying about the bad steps which are behind me, enjoying the present moment as much as possible. It is in the present that we live, laugh and love. The past is only a memory and the future is unknown. The actual experience is the experience of the present, the living, laughing and loving. One has to acquire excellence in this. It is not only an act of living, of laughing or loving. The purity of nature has to manifest, the positive and the qualitative aspect of life has to manifest. That is what one has to live. Therefore, attaining excellence in the present is the purpose and aim of life, according to my understanding.

In certain asanas, some teachers say to start on the right side, others on the left side. What is right, or better?

Again there is a simple answer and a philosophical answer. The simple answer is start wherever convenient. The complicated answer: left is the lunar aspect, right is the solar, the vital

aspect. Exercising the right side first increases vitality and exercising the left side first increases tranquillity. Depending on your needs, you can decide which side to begin with.

I work in mental health. I use yoga nidra with great success. Could you recommend some other form of relaxation or meditation?

Yoga nidra is definitely one of the most comprehensive techniques of relaxation in the world today. The original system of yoga nidra was discovered by our guru, Swami Satyananda. Since then many teachers have developed their own system of yoga nidra based on the original practices. Depending on the specific needs of society, even in mental health, many people have used yoga nidra effectively in order to rectify a particular condition of mind and cultivate a better condition of mind through sankalpas, through developing self-awareness, self-understanding and by recognizing the existence of the physical body.

There are students who suddenly realized after yoga nidra that they had a little toe. They had never 'entered' the little toe before. Connection with the body is a revelation. It makes you appreciate yourself; it makes you appreciate this wonderful factory in which everything works in perfect harmony, in order, in sequence. Connecting with the body, recognizing your body, is knowing the miracle that has taken place in your life. Yoga nidra is an evolving technique. You can relax the body, you can relax the mind, you can relax the emotions, you can even go on trips around the world, you can enter the psychic dimension, you can cultivate the right sankalpa; yoga nidra has a large area of influence.

One meditation which can complement yoga nidra in mental health, especially if the mind is active and dissipated, is the practice of *trataka* or candle-gazing. If you cannot use a candle, if it is dangerous, you can use a dot on the wall. Make a coloured dot on A4 paper, put it on the wall and do *trataka* on it. Even simple, basic geometrical figures can be used, images of yantras can be used. The *trataka* form of meditation will intensify the effects of relaxation and balance.

When I do my mantra before sleeping, sometimes I stay awake and develop some fears, so I stopped my mantra in the evening and I only practise it in the morning.

It often happens that when you practise mantra at night, you release stress and relax the mind, so when you go to bed and try to sleep, you are already so relaxed that sleep does not come. If that happens, you should move into the practice of yoga nidra and go to sleep while practising it. The quality of sleep will change and a different conditioning will begin to take place, which in the course of time will enable you to relax and enjoy your rest. It can happen in the beginning because our mind is not trained or used to this state, so you have to shape your mind gradually. Fear is just a psychological reaction to a deep, unconscious feeling that if you are not able to sleep, you will be tense tomorrow. This feeling can manifest in the form of anxiety or fear. Nothing to worry about, just do your yoga nidra.

Do you have some capsule for knee problems?

The best practice for knee problems is the system of pawanmuktasana part one. You can learn it at the centre, and if you know it, then practise it regularly and do not practise other advanced asanas.

Often in my dreams yogis from the past or present appear. Even you appeared in one of my dreams. Is it my creation, or does it mean something?

Well, I think it is nice to see yogis and myself in a dream, and I guess it indicates your aspiration and your unconscious connection with your spiritual life. So keep on dreaming!

Everybody is saying that if you love yourself, you can love others, but the big problem is how to love yourself and let others love you. What is the path to start loving oneself?

I look at it from the other perspective: When you begin to love others more, you naturally begin to appreciate yourself more. If you begin to like yourself before you begin to love others, there is a possibility that you will become a narcissist and it

may lead to the path of confinement, where the path becomes narrower and narrower. Self-protection will become stronger and stronger and you will become more grossly material in nature. That is the problem when you love yourself first and others come second.

From my understanding, it should be the other way around. You love other people more and more, not only your family or close ones, but strangers and unknown people. Your act of loving is not sensorial or sensual. You just have to express unconditional love. Unconditional love is the same feelings that you have for people you consider your own. It is selfless love which has to be cultivated, love which is free from expectations, love based on support, friendship, cooperation, a love based on the aspirations of the other person. Parents have to know the aspirations of their children and of each other. In the defined parameters of life, strive to support each other to achieve that aspiration. This kind of attitude has to be developed in the family.

Alongside with this, you should also connect with people who are not part of your group or family and feel the same for them as you would feel for your own. Cultivating selfless love will lead to a more positive and creative appreciation of yourself. If you begin to say, "I love myself, I love myself," then you are actually conditioning your vision to see only yourself first. If you don't receive sympathy, affection or love from somebody else, your life can be shattered because of your own expectations.

So I would take the opposite view: Don't love yourself first. Accept yourself as you are at present and develop the selfless attitude of connecting unconditionally with everyone. Experience the purity of your intentions, your heart and your emotions. That will be a good start.

The Science of Total Wellbeing

Balatonfoldvar, Hungary, 22–25 May 2008

Wellbeing has three foundations, physical, mental and emotional. We can adopt different methods to feel wellbeing, but it is a short-term, not a long-term attainment. As old habits and desires, strong expectations and ambitions gain a greater hold, we slip into stress. Stress is the opposite of wellbeing. Either we are well or we are distressed, and as we do not have a proper foundation, our access to wellbeing is temporary. Wellbeing has three supports: philosophy, lifestyle and practice.

Whether our concept of wellbeing is physical, social, personal or global, we have to look at three components of life: mind, lifestyle and daily routine. The mind can make us connect with and participate creatively in the world. The same mind can take us in the other direction and we can be frustrated, depressed, unconcerned, self-centred and selfish. Therefore, the mental component is important to imbibe wellbeing. What is important to manage this mind? Rather than meditation or other practices of yoga, a basic philosophy of mind has to be developed first. We need to have an understanding of life, an awareness of life and a philosophy in life. The idea of wellness begins from this point onwards. The philosophy we adhere to indicates our future behaviour and our progression in life. It is not a belief system or religious philosophy, but something more practical and concrete by which we can experience the tranquillity, joy and peace within. A good philosophy in life is the first aspect of wellbeing.

The second aspect of wellness is modifying our lifestyle. Unless we modify our lifestyle, make an effort to change

our environment, our conditionings, behaviours and habits, wellbeing cannot be experienced. Fine-tuning the lifestyle is also necessary in order to experience total wellbeing.

The third aspect is routine. The routine of our daily life has to be modified so that we are not accumulating stresses, tensions, confusions and conflicts. When we are not cramming ourselves with certain ideas and beliefs which confuse us, we are able to progress in a gentle, systematic, relaxed way through our daily routine. Mind management with a philosophy, lifestyle management and routine management constitute the process of acquiring wellbeing in life.

Imbibing the right philosophy of wellbeing

The first component of wellbeing is imbibing the right philosophy. The problem with philosophy is that it remains philosophy and does not become practice. Our present philosophy of life is conditioned. The practical aspect of philosophy is more important than the theory. By philosophy I do not mean ideas of God and creation, universe, life, existence and soul, but understanding the evolutionary process of life. We are all going through a process of evolution from birth till death. The body is always going through a process of change and transformation physically. Similarly, we evolve and mature mentally and emotionally. However, there is one component of life we have not really looked into, and that is spiritual life. Spiritual life is confused with religious life, but they are altogether different. Spiritual life is one eye and religious life is the other eye. These two eyes can see the world, but they cannot see each other.

Spirituality means connecting with what is auspicious, appropriate and good. Spiritual means connecting with one's inner source of strength. Spiritual discipline has shown a way to improve the human personality. In ashtanga yoga, the first two stages are yama and niyama. After the yamas and niyamas come asana, pranayama, meditation and other practices of yoga. The yamas and niyamas represent spiritual philosophy, identification with a positive conditioning of mind. Read the *Yoga Sutras*, but do not try to analyze the interpretations of the

sutras. Try to understand them as practical applications in life. The yamas are *satya*, truthfulness, *ahimsa*, non-violence, *asteya*, non-stealing, *aparigraha*, non-covetousness, and *brahmacharya*, continence. The yamas rectify the behaviour of the human personality and nature. Truth is a state of consciousness, not words and language. Truth is the realization of being sincere, not false. Our life is full of falseness and manipulation. Even so-called spiritually enlightened people crave power. They have never looked into the yamas and niyamas, but believe that meditation is the first and foremost practice.

Common sense says that if meditation was foremost, it would have been placed first in the sequence of yoga, not as the seventh stage. If Sage Patanjali had wanted meditation to be first, he would have placed it first, and the yamas might have come at the end. So-called exponents of yoga today manipulate the system of yoga and do not see the relevance of the sequence defined in the tradition for improving life. If you are a true and sincere seeker, you have to start your journey with the first step, which is developing a proper philosophy for your growth and progress in life. This philosophy begins with association with truth, *satya*. *Satya*, *ahimsa*, *asteya*, *aparigraha* and *brahmacharya* constitute yogic philosophy.

Cultivating positive associations

Prior to cultivating the yamas and niyamas, realizing one's associations and connections is foremost. Is the association positive, truthful and uplifting? Is it destructive, detrimental and depressive? From the yogic perspective we need to associate with people who can inspire and encourage us to face life with dignity and help us to follow a system by which we can realize the beauty life has to offer. A positive association cultivates a positive mind. When you are surrounded by good people, you feel good and when you are surrounded by negative people, your own thoughts, expressions and attitudes become negative. One rotten apple can ruin the entire bucket, but a hundred good apples cannot improve the quality of the bad apple. That is the power of negativity and conditioning. If you are able to remove a rotten influence or association from

your life, you are well on the path of wellbeing, but if you cannot, do not think about wellbeing. There is no middle path, no adjustment. Either something is rotten or fresh and pure. Therefore, spiritual disciplines require constant awareness of influences, people, situations and conditions where you are restricted and of places, situations and conditions where you are able to express yourself and grow.

In Sanskrit, this is known as satsang. *Sanga* means association, coming together, *sat* means realizing the true nature. One who realizes their own truthful nature and associates with those who are truthful is a *satsangi*, one who is involved in the process of truthful association. Satsang does not mean lectures, discussions and answers, but associating with a truthful nature. This has to be brought into your life. Most decisions about friends and associates are not mature, but based on likes, dislikes, ambitions and needs. People who are trying to improve their associations and qualities are yogis. Practising postures in front of a mirror is not yoga. Yoga is taking responsibility for oneself. Postures, meditation, kundalini and kriya yoga do not represent yoga; they are systems and practices belonging to a group called yoga. It is your conviction and your motivation to change and bring the beauty of the universe into your life which is the aspiration of yoga. Therefore, the first aspect of wellbeing is imbibing the right philosophy, first defining, realizing and knowing with whom you associate.

Due to mental conditioning it is easier to associate with the negative and destructive. Children are easily influenced by their friends due to association. They cannot relate to their parents properly and fear them due to association. Sitting your child on your lap twenty times a day is not association, for when the time comes, that child will hide his real intentions from you. Behind your back everything is happening with their friends. Many parents are the judge, jury and executioner and have lost the ability to associate in a friendly manner with other people and their own children.

Just look at your interactions and participation in society and how distinct you are from each other. People do not know their next door neighbours. You live in an isolated world. It

is a trend that is evolving and becoming stronger. The quest for material happiness isolates individuals. The quest for spiritual experiences unites people. There has to be a balance between the material and the spiritual. Do not negate one because of the other. Bring them together and start yoga by defining your associations.

Maintaining positive attitudes

The second component of cultivating wellbeing is observing and modifying our attitudes and maintaining an optimistic, positive attitude. If attitudes are negative, there is no inner clarity, no mental clarity, and the mind goes into a dark space where the world looks grey and glum. Positivity has to be maintained in all situations, knowing that this too will pass. The world is not only suffering. You identify with suffering because it seems to be greater, and happiness is only a sprinkle of salt on top of the vegetables of suffering. Wanting fifty percent sorrow and fifty percent happiness is a big imbalance. Ninety percent sorrow and ten percent happiness is a good combination. Start with ten percent optimism and you will begin to love the ten percent of positivity, which in the course of time will multiply and increase until you are fully stable in that positive, optimistic attitude.

Searching for the right association is a philosophy of life. Developing the right attitude is a philosophy of life because it is something practical which can be experienced and felt in your own self, not a philosophy which says to have love and compassion for all. How can one talk of love, compassion or God, the transcendental and divine, without having purified the mind, behaviour and character? A classic example is yoga practitioners who have practised meditation for many years, but are unable to deal with or confront the dissipated nature of their mind. They are unable to realize that the basic structure has to be rectified first through the yamas and niyamas.

Cultivating humility

The stages before the yamas and niyamas are positive associations, a positive, optimistic attitude and cultivating humility.

Humility is the absence of arrogance and ego. It is balanced self-esteem, a positive self-image that one cultivates and corrects with the softer sentiments and emotions of life. Humility is a sattvic quality of mind whereas arrogance is a tamasic quality.

These three principles should become the personal philosophy of everyone, and then one is very much on the path of wellbeing. Contentment, peace and joy are the natural outcome of living this philosophy. Live these three principles and forget what other people say. They are the results of living a balanced, harmonious life. Physical wellbeing only will come about with the practice of hatha yoga. Mental wellbeing only will come with the practice of raja yoga. Emotional wellbeing will not be acquired through bhakti yoga and intellectual satisfaction will not be acquired by jnana yoga. It will all happen once you are able to live the philosophies of humility, positivity and right association.

Living the philosophy

The first understanding that has to develop is connected with our associations and connections with other people, nature, the world and society. Inspiring associations uplift and depressing associations pull us down. Awareness of association is important as it is one area where generally we fail as individuals. Our associations or connections are sensorial, sensual, physical or emotional. Our relationships are based on passions, on expectations of fulfilment, on the search for security, affection and friendship. It doesn't matter whether the association is with a person, an idea, a thought or a belief. We have to cultivate the right virtue, the opposite virtue in our life which can inspire and guide us.

The spiritual path is the path of a gardener, not of a warrior. The victory of a warrior comes after violence, whereas a gardener can create a beautiful garden from nothing through his natural abilities. We are all waiting for the flowering of the beauty of our nature, but we don't know how it can happen, how to water the dry earth, how to plant the right seeds and how to take care of them. Once we have that skill, there is no stopping

the experiences of human evolution and comfort, joy, wisdom, peace and prosperity. Just as we guard what we have planted carefully against outside attacks by wild animals, insects and birds, just as every day we water a little seed until it becomes a small bush, and just as we prune and trim the overgrowth and extra branches to ensure that the tree is healthy and straight, we have to do the same with our life and our mind. We have to protect ourselves against negative influences.

We are susceptible to what is negative. We believe in the negative more easily than we believe in truth, although we search for the good, not the bad. We can't extract ourselves from this material conditioning of the mind, but there are ways to fine-tune the human personality, which can happen once we have developed an appropriate philosophy to help guide our actions. Association is one, maintaining positivity is another and being humble is another.

Association should be seen from all perspectives, not only the physical or social, but also the ideological, emotional and spiritual. There are ideologies that govern the human intellect and ideologies that touch the human heart. Ideologies that touch the human head, or intellect, create or derive the kind of response which is sequential, linear and orderly. Ideologies and thoughts that touch the human heart derive a response which is more creative, artistic and universal in nature. If we use our head, our intellect, to decide, we will notice that the first response is towards oneself. What will I gain from it? How will this situation, event or condition help me? So the intellect becomes more self-centred, self-oriented, even selfish.

Ideologies which govern the heart, project the emotions and sentiments outwards, which connect us with other people around us. This is the spiritual ideology, the spiritual behaviour, thoughts and virtues that make us more connected with the world and more selfless. Intellectual ideologies make us more self-centred, more aware of ourselves and more selfish. When we are selfish, there is isolation from the world. When we are selfless, there is connection with the world. Therefore, association has to be seen in relation to our ideologies, thoughts and beliefs, which can be social, cultural,

academic, or religious in nature, as we are all living under their influence.

The relationship has to be discovered with our ambitions, aspirations, desires, expectations and attachments. A wider perspective of life has to develop. What kind of person would you like to be in ten years? With what kind of strength, character, virtue and mentality? Don't say enlightened, that doesn't make any sense. Enlightenment is only a word, but this word indicates a process, a conversion of the qualities of life, conversion of the gross mind into a sublime mind. Enlightenment is a process of going through different states of conversions. What is the state of enlightenment of a fruit tree? You won't see a tree, fruit or flower inside the seed, but if the conditions are right, one day the seed will split and a sprout will come forth. In order to sprout, the seed has to die. Are you willing to kill your seed in order to sprout? Are you willing to split your seed in order to sprout? It is difficult, because your seed is your security in life. While you remain confined to your aspirations, ambitions, needs and desires, you cannot really change your perspective. You cannot change the direction of your participation and involvement in the world. You are unable to see yourself as you truly are for you always put different masks on your face and different colours on your body, which hides your true nature.

In the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali, the first three statements are the most important. What is yoga? Sage Patanjali says it is a form of discipline. What is the attainment of this discipline? He says it is being able to manage and control the mental modifications and fluctuations. Sometimes we are on the peaks of happiness, joy and creativity and sometimes we are down in depression, suffering and pain. Therefore, positive and negative, struggle and surrender, create changes in the mental behaviour. Normally one is unable to handle these ever-changing mental behaviours, or *vrittis*. Like is a *vritti*, dislike is a *vritti*, love and hate are *vrittis*, good thoughts and bad thoughts are *vrittis*. Everything is a *vritti* because it all fluctuates. One who can be free from the influence of the *vrittis* and manage the *vritti* manifestations is a yogi.

What is the result of having control of the fluctuations of the mind? In the third statement Sage Patanjali says that you discover your real nature, a nature which is free and pure, a character, a life that does not hide behind an imposed mask. This ability has to be cultivated by becoming aware of the foundations of the life philosophy. Maintaining positivity and optimism in times of distress and pressure is difficult, but if you keep on trying, the right virtue and strength will be cultivated. Being humble is difficult because it means managing your ego and if you are unable to manage your ego it is difficult to have humility.

These are the three philosophies which have to be incorporated in our lives, in the form of a thought, an idea and an aspiration. It has to become part of the lifestyle. How can a philosophy become a lifestyle? There are certain practices and techniques which can be used to cultivate an altered state of mind, which can shield us against negative influences that disturb the peace and cause distress.

Mantra cultivates positive attitudes and strength

Mantra should become part of the lifestyle. For those who wish to have spiritual awakening, mantra is the first item to be incorporated in one's life. For those who want physical, psychological benefits, hatha yoga is wonderful, but for those who wish to develop spiritual awareness, the journey begins with mantra. Mantra should be practised first thing in the morning to create a positive state of mind and to define how positive and constructive your associations will be during the day. I am talking here of general mantras, not the guru mantra, which is a sadhana, a meditative process of internalization. General mantras are *sankalpas*, positive affirmations.

When you sleep at night, your body and mind relax. The stress levels of the body and mind equalize, the energies become balanced. When you wake up in the morning, the first thing you hear is the alarm, which is like disturbing the peace of a still lake. When the waters of the lake are still, they become the mirror to reflect the sky, the trees, the mountains the clouds, everything. Throwing a rock in the middle of the

lake immediately shatters the stillness and disturbs the water. Concentric circles spread out to the shore. Clarity is gone. You continue to bombard the lake with stones continuously for twelve hours. When you are tired of throwing rocks and stones in the lake, you go to bed and sleep, and again the lake becomes still. You do this to yourself every day. The first sound that goes into the consciousness is the alarm. Your subconscious is naturally disturbed. Sometimes there is irritability and lethargy.

In the morning, as soon as you wake up, practise the Mahamrityunjaya mantra and the Gayatri mantra. The vibrations create a positive state in the subconscious mind. Mahamrityunjaya mantra is the mantra of healing. Chanting it eleven times plants the seed of healing and wellbeing in the subconscious mind. Gayatri mantra is the mantra of wisdom, knowledge and understanding. When you chant the Gayatri mantra, you are invoking that energy, awareness and strength which allows you to open your mind and receive a deeper understanding of yourself. Chanting these two mantras takes about five minutes. While chanting, identify with the energy of the mantra and the *sankalpa*, or affirmation of healing and the affirmation of wisdom. Begin the day with this positive resolution for health and healing, understanding and wisdom.

You will discover that you respond differently to situations which are normally disturbing. It will protect you from negative thinking generated by other influences. You will have more strength, courage and clarity to deal with situations and be able to maintain a positive attitude of mind for longer periods. Mantra sadhana is an effective and powerful tool to create a foundation and personal philosophy in life. It relates to the second aspect of philosophy, which is maintaining positive attitudes. The aim is the cultivation of a positive state of mind. Mantra is incorporated in lifestyle to acquire positive strength.

Reviewing the day improves associations

How do we manage our associations, attachments, attractions and relationships? The simplest way is knowing where we are

compatible and incompatible. The first practice is reviewing our day from the time we woke up in the morning until the time we went to bed. It is to be done at night. Go through the entire waking period, acknowledging and recognizing every moment consciously. Observe where we have failed in positive approaches, relationships and associations. Some discussion, some conflict, some clash of interest, some aggression, some insecurity, some fear – we observe everything we have gone through during the day. Think, “If I encounter the same situation again, how can I control my response to it.” We try to discover why we responded or reacted in a particular manner. Was it due to our attachments or to our ambitions? Was it due to expectations? Was it due to our emotional tensions or frustrations? Was it our need? Was it our desire? We try to know everything about that particular incident and how to manage it in a better way if we encounter it again. We connect with our strength and positivity. The causes of dissatisfaction have to be known.

If you don’t know what disturbs you, how can you attain peace? You have to know what disturbs you, so you can manage it more effectively and efficiently. Only then can you strive for peace, not before. Peace is an attainment, not the goal of life. The goal of life is to keep on improving. In this process of improving, many good things happen naturally. You did not learn how to be envious, greedy or jealous in any school, household, temple or church. It came naturally. It is natural to want to know how to love, to be compassionate and kind. It has to grow naturally. You have to provide the right opportunity and condition. Just as negativity came out when the condition was right, positivity will also come out when there is the right condition. Therefore, give yourself the right opportunity to create the right condition.

Observing the routine during the day allows you to see your own self acting in the world. It allows you to review how you have lived in the past twelve hours. It allows you to recognize your strength when you have succeeded and your shortcomings and weaknesses when you have failed. Observe the shortcomings and weaknesses and try to discover better

ways to manage them another time. You have many choices which you can experiment with.

Reviewing the day is one method of improving your relationships and associations. In this process you are seeing yourself, trying to improve yourself, not desiring to change the world without changing yourself. It is human nature to want to change the world, but not oneself. Here the opposite view has to be taken. If you put on black sunglasses, the world is seen as black. If you put on red sunglasses, the world is seen as red. If you remove the sunglasses or just use transparent glass, the world is seen as it is. So when you observe the world, you have to think which colour glasses you have put on. Are you seeing the world as a dark place where everything is struggle, strife and suffering and there is no strong drive to excel? Or do you see the world as a bright place where you have the opportunity to express your creativity, improve yourself and your environment through determination and wisdom? You have to believe that there is always an opportunity to improve. Not only believe, but realize it too.

SWAN for self-discovery

The second way to improve associations is by knowing one's strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs, which play a major role in relationships and associations. My ambition attaches me to something, to somebody, to some identity, to some idea and some motivation. My weaknesses make me wear a mask where I begin to believe that I am not that weak person. We have been conditioned to cover ourselves with a hard shell. Emotion is part of our lives. Crying does not make one weak. By being ourselves and expressing ourselves, we know who we really are. Suppression leads to an explosion of emotions and we experience agony.

Knowing your strengths and weaknesses, ambitions and needs is therefore an important aspect of knowing yourself. Don't try to discover the concept of 'atman' and 'paramatman' that you have read about in the scriptures, but try to understand what makes you tick first. The primary class of yoga is discovering the self, the person who is alive and active in this

manifest world. The other can be an aspiration in life, but not the need. The first step of yoga is self-discovery, knowing oneself. Even meditation has to become a process of knowing oneself. Meditation should never be attempted to realize the higher self, because that is only fantasy and imagination, not working with the grand realities of life, but moving into an imaginary world where you feel secure and safe. Therefore, knowing your strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs is the second step in improving your interaction and association with society, with family, friends, with near and distant ones. If you are able to remain objective, you will discover solutions to many problems that are interpersonal in nature. The problems of incompatibility, expectations, desires and attachments can be managed effectively and efficiently by knowing these four parts of your personality.

Humility, simplicity and purity

Cultivating humility is the third aspect. Humility can be cultivated by knowing that you are only a contributor to your life, not the master of your life. If you think you are the master, arrogance comes in, but if you think you are a contributor to the betterment of life, then there is a greater appreciation of what to do and how to do it. Humility is seen in our actions and our lives. Humility does not mean becoming weak, not turning the other cheek if somebody slaps you. Humility means not being affected by ego manifestations. Hatred or jealousy cannot touch you. Arrogance cannot alter your perception. You remain simple and pure. Simplicity and purity constitute humility. You can also become aware of this inner strength through meditation.

In this way you can incorporate some of the yogic principles and philosophies into your lifestyle. You develop a philosophy, you incorporate certain simple adjustments into your lifestyles with the help of mantra in the morning, with the help of self-observation at night to review the activities of the day and by making a list of strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs. You strive to cultivate a strength and transform a weakness into a positive quality, and you prioritize the

needs and ambitions. You return to meditation to cultivate a balanced attitude, a peaceful disposition and better managed responses and reactions, to experience humility. You can also incorporate other yogic techniques and systems and practices of hatha yoga and raja yoga.

Practical wellbeing – five yoga capsules

The first capsule is the morning mantra sadhana, which reinforces the positivity and optimism of the mind, planting the seeds of healing, wellbeing and wisdom in the subconscious mind.

The second capsule takes fifteen minutes before breakfast and consists of four or five asanas for optimum physical wellbeing. Tadasana stretches the whole body, releasing tension from the joints and allowing circulation of blood and prana shakti. Tiryak tadasana contracts and expands the lateral muscles in the sides of the body, removing stiffness and realigning the spinal cord, lessening the pressures of the discs between the vertebrae and helping lower back problems. Kati chakrasana twists the body from side to side, removing toxins from the digestive system and providing more flexibility to the back muscles and more mobility to the waist and hips. The fourth asana is salute to the sun, *surya namaskara*. The fifth asana is an inverted posture to reverse the force of gravity. These five postures are enough to provide a normal person with complete health and wellbeing. If done regularly over a period of time, a definite transformation will be felt in the flexibility of the body.

Pranayama is the third yoga capsule needed before breakfast. *Nadi shodhana*, alternate nostril breathing, and *bhramari pranayama*, humming bee breath, are the two pranayama practices important to relax the nerves, to balance the functions of the left and right hemispheres of the brain, to increase the vitality and stamina of the body and to strengthen the body in order to harmonize dissipated energies.

Yoga nidra for relaxation is the fourth capsule you need during the day at siesta time, after lunch, or if that is not possible, when you return home from work. For fifteen minutes

practise the short version of yoga nidra called a power nap. Relax the body, rotate the awareness to the different parts of the body twice, observing and identifying each part and relaxing it. After two body rotations, count the breaths from twenty-seven back to one with awareness of the body expanding and relaxing. Afterwards remind yourself that you have left work behind and change your mind set completely.

The fifth capsule is mantra meditation at night for ten minutes and reviewing the day's activities.

These five capsules need to be consumed every day. You will discover that you are better able to manage your responses and reactions. Generally we accumulate a lot of stress, tension and anxiety in our mind and body. Once a week we go to the yoga class and try to de-stress, but it is not possible to remove the week's accumulations in one class. Whenever stress, tensions, anxieties and frustrations accumulate, they have to be managed immediately. Spreading the yoga practices in five different parts will help to attain inner balance, harmony and purity in a much simpler way without much effort.

Combining yoga practices with lifestyle and philosophy

These are the practices of yoga which are beneficial for attaining wellbeing. Mantra is for mental wellbeing, asana and pranayama for physical wellbeing, relaxation for removing stress from the inner personality and mantra meditation is for spiritual wellbeing. Remember that these practices have to be combined with lifestyle and philosophy. Only then can the concept of wellbeing be complete. The effort you make externally should be compatible with the effort you are trying to make internally. The external physical hatha yoga practices must be compatible with your inner aspirations and drive. The purpose of hatha yoga is to manage the manifestation and expression of the vital and mental forces. Selecting the right combination of hatha yoga practices will have a big impact on the development of the body and nourishment of the mind. Along with yoga practice, try to adjust your lifestyle and develop a philosophy through which you are able to express harmony, and connect with the peace and bliss inside you.

Living Yoga

Satyanandashram Hellas, Greece, 27–29 May 2008

The teachings of Swami Sivananda create the foundation for living the experience of yoga. For Swami Sivananda, yoga started after the perfection of Sage Patanjali's yoga. The stages of Patanjali's yoga represent the drive to attain, and after attainment one has to experience living. We will look at the attainment of Patanjali's yoga and how to live the experience of yoga in Sivananda yoga.

Yoga in society conveys mainly the yoga teachings of hatha yoga, the physical aspect of yoga for experiencing wellness and fitness of the body. Some schools emphasize meditation to cultivate spiritual awareness. Other schools have adopted one form of yoga as their teaching, but this does not represent yoga. Hatha yoga is not the only yoga, nor is raja yoga, meditation or any other practice, for all these different paths and practices of yoga represent only one branch. Hatha yoga is physical in nature, raja yoga is psychological, jnana yoga is intellectual and bhakti yoga is more emotional. Every branch of yoga deals with a particular area of personality, whose abilities and qualities are enhanced by the different practices.

Patanjali's yoga – personal development

The most common form of yoga is *ashtanga yoga*, the eightfold path outlined by Sage Patanjali. It is the yoga of personal, inner, psycho-emotional development. The eight stages of ashtanga yoga are classified as physical, psychological, spiritual and the cultivation of virtues. The yamas and niyamas deal with

fine-tuning the human personality, harnessing the creativity of human nature, the character and personality. Asana and pranayama provide the body with wellness by detoxifying, enhancing the energies and removing imbalances. The systems of pratyahara and dharana regulate the emotional and psychological expressions of the mind. The components of meditation and samadhi make it possible to come into contact with our spiritual nature. According to Sage Patanjali, these stages combined represent the most comprehensive plan for the development of the human personality. The progression through these systems of yoga stands for the drive to attain something qualitative in life. The goal is to develop a better quality of character, body, mind and emotions.

After Patanjali – selfless expression

After we have perfected Patanjali's eight stages, what do we do next? Our journey does not stop after acquiring the good and the beautiful in life. Rather, this journey results in a transformation in the realm of consciousness and energy. The attainment is a transformation in the perceptions and experience of consciousness and energy. With this change in perspective, a special philosophy begins to develop within, which is not based on receiving, but on opening up the mind, ideas, sentiments, feelings and emotions. It is an opening up away from the self-oriented consciousness towards selfless attitudes and expressions. A qualitative change happens in the human personality after the perfection of yoga. It is the process of opening up.

Imagine an unopened flower bud which is not yet mature. The essence, colours, beauty and fragrance of the flower are all concentrated in the bud while the flower is forming. Smell, colour and form are all taking shape as an experience. Once the bud has grown to maturity and opens up in full bloom, the colours are now visible and can be appreciated by everyone. The smell, previously confined to the bud, has now become a fragrance wafting in the wind.

In creation we see these two states of acquiring and expressing. The flower has gone through a process from

acquiring to expressing. In the same way, life is a process of acquiring and expressing. However, people generally identify more with acquiring and less with expressing. It is the preoccupation with acquiring that makes us self-oriented, self-centred and selfish. Moreover, it closes the doors of the intellect, the heart, the emotions and the mind. We are happy in our own world. Whatever challenges our comfort zone is rejected. Anything that does not conform to our ideas of fulfilment and joy is disregarded. We live our life in a straitjacket. Our mind, body and concepts are put into a straitjacket. We are taught to look at the world in a particular way and what does not fit into that view does not exist.

There was a time when we were aware of the glory and beauty of the sunrise and the sunset. They were something mystical and attractive, harmonious, fulfilling and uplifting. Today when we look at the sunset or sunrise, our mathematical and scientific mind breaks down the sunrays into electrons that hit the atmosphere. The light particles spread everywhere and thus create different hues and colours. We have become sequential and linear, losing touch with our artistic and creative side which can appreciate nature and beauty. It is important to find a balance between the two hemispheres of the brain, between the artistic, creative side and the logical, sequential side. In my experience, the artistic, creative side has the tendency to open up, to give and to expand. The logical, linear side has the tendency to accumulate, to receive and to acquire. Furthermore, it is natural when looking at the world through the intellect to see what is beneficial for 'me'.

When we see the world through our heart, a more selfless perspective emerges. We ask ourselves, "What can I do for others?" or "How can I connect with others?" The head receives, but the heart gives. Therefore, it can be said that in Sage Patanjali's yoga we are dealing with the expressions of the mind, from pratyahara to dharana to dhyana to samadhi. We attain, acquire and become a qualitative person.

Going a step further, in Swami Sivananda's yoga, the expression of yoga begins with four stages: the ability to serve, love, give and remain pure from all influences. Service

represents a selfless connection with people, the environment, nature and the world. Love represents a connection with people, the environment, the world and nature. Love is not conditional, demanding or expecting, but giving. It is not sensorial, sensual or physical gratification, but a spiritual, broad and compassionate connection. Then comes giving, where one does not hold onto attachments but acknowledges the realities of life. Giving and sharing represent the encouragement one can provide to help another person grow and mature at all levels. The fourth stage is purification, maintaining inner purity, simplicity and innocence. Together these four represent the beginning of Swami Sivananda's yoga. Moreover, they also represent a philosophy, a state of understanding that dawns with the perfection of yoga.

Develop a spiritual philosophy

A basic philosophy that nurtures spiritual development, which is beyond the social, religious or material perspective of life, is necessary in everybody's life. This philosophy is based on selfless connection, involvement or association. You know that you are experiencing compassion when you feel compassionate towards strangers, not only those people whom you call your own. You know when you have learned to love as you begin to love total strangers, not only those with whom you identify. You know you are transforming in your cocoon and becoming a butterfly as your heart opens to the world and to the environment around you. A spiritual philosophy is a must, a necessary component in everybody's life in order to enrich life and to understand the process of yoga.

Yoga means union, to unite. However, this union, at whatever level, philosophical, religious, physical or psychological, can only happen when there is an understanding of the process of union. If you presume yoga is union of the individual consciousness with the higher consciousness, you need to know both the individual consciousness and the higher consciousness, and bring the two together. If you consider it to be union of the dissipated energies of the body, you need to know which energies are dissipating in order to

unite them. If you approach it as a union of the dissipated states of consciousness, you need to have an understanding of those states of consciousness which are dissipated in order to bring them together.

The word union is too broad a category. It is like throwing everything in a large bag. The most basic understanding of a personal spiritual philosophy is union of the intellect and sentiments. It is a union of practical applied wisdom, with a heart full of the desire to connect and do good. Therefore, one needs to have a proper philosophy and apply it to life. According to Swami Sivananda, 'serve, love, give, purify' constitute the four foundations of a personal spiritual philosophy.

Maintain uplifting associations

Furthermore, according to the yogic literature, maintaining positive and uplifting associations is a must in developing the appropriate philosophy. One should be observant and watchful of one's associations, and know which are appropriate and inappropriate. Negative associations are powerful. One percent of negativity can alter ninety-nine percent of positive strengths and qualities. Ninety-nine percent positivity cannot change the power of that one percent of negativity. Therefore, one has to enforce one's own psychology with positive affirmations, thoughts and sankalpas.

There should be awareness of those associations and connections that restrict and inhibit the expression of the personality. When a farmer plants a special seed in the ground, he also makes arrangements to protect the seed from vermin, birds, animals, insects and the weather. The same principle applies to the cultivation of positive associations. You have to protect your positivity from negative influences and stresses which create an imbalance in life. You have to regulate, observe and monitor your associations and connect with the positive, creative and constructive. Don't try to change the negative. After all, every rose grows on a stem full of thorns. You can't remove all the thorns from all the roses. You have to connect with the beauty, harmony and nature of the rose

and not with the stem. Ignore the thorns and keep on looking at the beauty of the rose. Even if you find thorny situations, thorny people and circumstances, look at the beauty.

There are family members who are destructive, detrimental and restrictive and those who are optimistic and positive. How do you deal with them? Remember that acknowledging your association is a personal matter. The entire nature is governed by good and bad. When it is fifty-fifty, there is harmony. Your personality and nature is also fifty-fifty good and bad. When you are anxious, frustrated, depressed, negative or pessimistic, you are connecting with the dark side of your personality. When you are at peace with yourself, you connect with the light side of your personality. The whole of life in creation is fifty-fifty plus and minus, positive and negative, optimistic and pessimistic. A dog can lick your face one day and take a big bite out of it the next. A human being who is your friend today can turn against you tomorrow. People who are in love feel united today and totally disunited and separate tomorrow. It depends which aspect of your personality or perspective you connect with. Certainly, connecting with the positive and the optimistic in life goes hand in hand with cultivating the right associations.

Maintain balanced attitudes

To develop right associations, another important effort has to be made, which is maintaining a positive and balanced attitude. This is possibly the most difficult thing because of the different types of stress we are under. Stress disconnects us from our inner harmony, our strength, optimism, clarity, creativity and constructive participation in life. To maintain a positive perspective is the hardest thing to acquire in life. We should analyze ourselves for a few moments and see if we are optimistic or pessimistic by nature. Do we feel happy or depressed when we look at all the challenges in front of us? What kind of nature is predominant right now? To remain positive is the hardest sadhana of life. When we talk of living yoga we try to understand the components of awareness and positivity that need to be cultivated. Just as

salt gives taste to food, awareness gives taste to the different mental expressions and experiences. We can be positive only if there is constant awareness. Yoga attempts to make us observe ourselves, to realize ourselves. Yoga inspires us to become a witness, an observer of our actions, performance and expressions in life in general. Therefore, together with awareness, preservation of positivity keeps us in touch with the present.

Become humble

The third aspect that the yogic literature talks about as part of a personal philosophy is the cultivation of humility, which is the continuation of right association and maintaining a positive attitude.

Cultivate faith in inner strength

The fourth aspect of a yogic philosophy is staying in touch with our own inner strength. In the past civilizations around the Mediterranean, every male child had to undergo a ritual at the age of twelve or thirteen. The child was taken blindfolded into the forest at night and told to sit on a tree stump. He remained there alone, unable to see, and hearing wild noises he had to confront his own fear. The boy was unable to tell other children of his experience. It was his personal experience of survival throughout the night which made him into a man. Many boys would pass the night in absolute fear. When the blindfold was removed in the morning, they would discover their father sitting on a nearby tree stump, having watched over them the whole night, protecting them from wild animals.

The same thing happens to us too. We are blindfolded. We feel we are alone and become frightened and insecure when we hear loud noises. Sometimes we might feel that somebody is coming to eat us up, or that situations are going to destroy us, that we are unable to handle situations. We get nervous because we can't see, but when our blindfold is removed, we realize that somebody else was sitting there beside us, watching over us all the time. Therefore, the fourth

component of yogic philosophy is to develop and cultivate faith and trust in inner strength, in the inner presence of the transcendental higher consciousness.

Develop a yogic lifestyle

We have looked at the philosophy of Swami Sivananda, which speaks of serving, loving, giving and purifying as the foundation of spiritual philosophy and expression in life. We have also looked at the classical yogic presentation of personal aspirations in life, cultivating positive associations, maintaining positivity and optimism at all times, becoming humble and connecting with inner strength. If we are able to adopt the principles of Swami Sivananda or of yoga as our stepping-stone into the spiritual discoveries of life, our perspective, vision and understanding will change. Life will be more harmonious. We will begin to live a new kind of lifestyle that joins the material and spiritual aspects.

Shankaracharya, one of the great thinkers and philosophers of eighth century India, once said that just as a bird needs two wings to fly high up into the sky, so does human life need the support of both the material and the spiritual aspects in order to nurture and express itself. Finding this balance in our lifestyle is the key to living yoga. What kind of understanding and change do we need to make in our lifestyles to live in a yogic way? Not much. Only cultivating an understanding of the different expressions of human personality and modifying and regulating our desires.

One important technique to understand and improve our lifestyle is SWAN sadhana. The word SWAN is an acronym for strength, weakness, ambition and need. Recognize your strengths and cultivate them to their maximum potential. Recognize your weaknesses and limitations and try to transcend them, try to be immune to their influences and develop them into positive strengths. Know your ambitions and whether they are attainable or whether they are just expectations without proper foundation. Know your needs and prioritize them. Once you have observed these four dimensions of your character, you can begin to connect with

your strengths and be clear about your needs. This awareness will bring about a qualitative change in your lifestyle.

Observing our expectations is a second fine-tuning that has to take place. Each action contains the seed of an expectation, a reward or a reaction. How we identify with those expectations, rewards and responses has to be observed. How we can be one hundred percent creative in our performance also has to be known. Driving a car, we know when to use first gear or neutral, when to use the brakes or accelerate, but nobody applies this simple principle to life. Everybody wants to drive in fourth gear without braking. Even at a red light we accelerate. However, this is not good for our performance. Sometimes we go through first gear, brake, stand still and then again move. Only when we have an open stretch of highway ahead can we go into overdrive cruise control and enjoy the scenery.

In this way, our lifestyle is modified by developing immunity to responses and reactions and by observing the four natural traits of the personality. In this way, we bring the attainments of yoga onto a level of life that can be experienced and expressed. When we are able to bring yoga to a level where it can be expressed, we begin to live yoga.

Living yoga does not mean practising asanas three times a day. It does not mean meditating in the morning and wearing a 'holier than thou' attitude all day. Living yoga means incorporating the yogic principles to fine-tune our nature so that our emotional, intellectual and physical abilities and faculties are guided by inner strengths. These inner strengths are the ones that ultimately nourish and enhance life. Life is seen as the reality, as auspicious and beautiful. Everyone likes to admire beauty. Let us take the sankalpa to make our life a beautiful one.

Satsang on Masters and Tradition

Satyanandashram Hellas, Greece, 27–29 May 2008

In your biography we find that you are considered a yogi from birth. Could you say something about this?

Well, it is a personal question but I will attempt to answer it anyway. I am a yogi from birth because from the beginning I was given the opportunity to grow up in the shade of yoga just like many other children who are here today. There is nothing special about it. As far as I'm concerned, I come from a humble background, but my parents had the opportunity to be associates and disciples of Sri Swamiji. Right from my early days I grew up under his tutelage. Just as every child, one day, will be thankful to their parents for giving them the opportunity to grow up in the shade of yoga, I am also grateful to my parents.

As far as I am concerned, I know I have no ability. I'll give you an example of what I mean. A sculptor picks up a stone and the stone becomes a statue which is admired by everyone. What is being admired here? The stone was a stone before it became an image and remains a stone even after it is sculpted. What has to be admired is the handiwork of the artist, who in this case is our guru. The rock shouldn't get the credit, but the artist.

You are the successor to Swami Satyananda. I believe you have big organizations. How can you have any time for yourself and for your sadhana?

Let me clarify certain things here. To begin with, I am not the leader of an organization. I was for some time the appointed

president of the Bihar School of Yoga. Just as there is a president for Sivananda Math, just as there is a president of the Yoga Research Foundation, or the Yoga Publications Trust, or the Bihar Yoga Bharati, so there is a president for the Bihar School of Yoga. In 2008, the governing body of the Bihar School of Yoga appointed a new president.

As for being the successor to Swami Satyananda, yes, he has announced this. However, just by somebody's announcing it, one does not become it. It takes years and years of preparation and hard work and until today I have not been able to go in that direction because how can I, with my limited abilities, imbibe the spirit of my guru, Swami Satyananda? When a little candle goes to meet the sun, it dissolves on the way. So, to become the successor of Swami Satyananda I know is an impossible feat. I can never become that. Nevertheless, I can attempt to become, if not the sun, at least a candle, and if not a candle, at least a spark.

I have received a new direction this year, so you could say that from 2008 I am embarking on a journey to experience and live sannyasa. Till now I have been engaged in other things. Maybe one day, when we meet again, you can ask me the same question and I'll tell you how far I still have to walk to become that. You can help me with your good wishes and prayers. This will support me on my journey.

To conclude, I am not a leader of a big organization, nor am I the successor of Swami Satyananda. He has given me a destination and I have to walk towards it. If I reach my destination, maybe one day you can say, "Yes, he was the successor," and if I don't reach that destination, you can say, "At least he tried."

You took sannyasa at a very early age in your life. Could you define the role of sannyasins in society? In what way is it different from the householder's life?

I do not think that I can define sannyasa for you because there is nothing comparable to this tradition in the West. The uninitiated think of sannyasa as a religious tradition of monks and recluses, thinkers and philosophers. They

think of sannyasa as a tradition of renunciation. This is the closest we can come to it from our modern perspective in order to understand the identity of a sannyasin. Sannyasa in reality never represented a religious order. Rather, it represented a tradition in which people devoted their life to preserving knowledge and wisdom which could lead humanity towards development and enable them to explore the spiritual dimension. They realized that living in society would inevitably create distress and strife for people and that a reconnection with their spiritual nature would lead people to greater, homogeneous and creative expression of their life.

The tradition of sannyasa evolved with the aim of discovering the spiritual dimensions, exploring the spiritual nature, and preserving and continuing with knowledge for the development of the human nature and personality. This traditional knowledge became known in the course of time as different philosophies and systems of acquiring self-discipline. Sannyasins are people who have dedicated their life to exploring the unexplored within themselves.

There is a difference between the life of a householder and that of a sannyasin. Society supports and encourages the sannyasa tradition, knowing that this tradition is the repository of ancient knowledge and practical wisdom which is imparted by sannyasins whenever the world stands at a crossroad. Different teachings in history have come down to us whenever there was the need for them. Buddha taught compassion and non-violence in a violent world. Adi Shankaracharya taught unity in diversity when people forgot their own inner strength and went their different ways. Christ came with the teachings of compassion and love in an uncompassionate, unloving world.

Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda brought the practice of yoga to us to experience the flowering of our personality in a stressful environment. The sannyasa tradition as a whole has always provided a positive solution to the stressful situations in life. Sannyasa was relevant in the past, it is relevant in the present and will be relevant in the future as well. Householders support the sannyasa tradition and

sannyasins in turn teach the householders to tread righteously on the appropriate path, in which they can express their creativity and experience wholeness.

Your tradition lays great stress on service and giving. Please say some words about their importance.

This is the philosophy of Sivananda yoga. Let me explain by giving you an example. Let's say you have practised years of meditation and suddenly one day you see your creator in front of you. You are very happy and you say to him, "I am so happy to be in your presence." God, the maker, will say he is not happy to see you because you have been a very selfish person all your life even though you have struggled to achieve a level of perfection. It is because you have always wanted everything for your own personal gratification. The meditation you did was for personal gratification. The samadhi you attained was to have a personal glimpse of the maker. You have also withdrawn from the outside world. God will say, "Now you have to make the effort to uplift other people with your skills and abilities. Until now you have lived a part of eternity in a selfish way, now you must live a part of eternity in a selfless way, and at the end when you come back I will take you in my arms." So God sends you back.

How do you express your creativity to fulfil the mandate of God? You connect with people, by helping those in need, by providing opportunities to those who have none to develop in life. This is the form of service, loving and giving that comes naturally when you have attained an illuminated spiritual state.

In history, when you look at the life of the enlightened beings and saints in all cultures and religions, you will find that the hallmark of their life has been service, loving and giving unconditionally. Spiritual perfection in their life is represented by these three acts: serve, love and give. This you see in both the Western Christian tradition and the Eastern ones. Therefore, the answer is in front of your eyes – express the creative in you, to bring out the beautiful in nature around you. This is the selfless contribution that an individual can

make for the betterment of the world. This is the philosophy which has to be cultivated in life.

Our guru, Swami Satyananda, has given a practical approach to Swami Sivananda's mandate. Yoga is a gift he gave us to develop ourselves at a personal level. Now it is the seva opportunity that we find in front of us. This gives us the opportunity to connect on the outer level with our pure sentiments. The outer level means the social level where we fulfil the needs of people, providing them with opportunities to become independent and self-reliant in life. Many of you have been a witness to this process unfolding in Rikhia. The world becomes a better place when there is a positive connection and association between people. The world becomes a deadly place when everybody withdraws into their own shell. So we choose how we want the future world to be.

Swami Satyananda performed panchagni sadhana, a very difficult penance from vedic times. Could you please comment on this, as well as saying something about the fact that your lineage seems to revive the ancient tradition of yajna as described in the Vedas.

Our guru, Swami Satyananda, has performed one of the most difficult sadhanas prescribed for paramahansa sannyasins. There are many other sadhanas and penances in this tradition that have been prescribed for people who follow this path. Throughout history people have performed these sadhanas and penances without which it is not possible to experience inner purity. Gold has to be melted in fire to bring out the pure gold and remove its impurities. In the same way, through these different sadhanas, transformations take place in the personality as the dross of material and sensorial attachments gradually subside and diminish.

Sri Swamiji has performed many other sadhanas, not only panchagni. However, people remember panchagni because they were the witnesses to this sadhana, which lasted for nine years. Therefore, the memories of panchagni are vivid in the mind. There is definitely a connection with the all-pervasive

consciousness after one has undergone these high penances. Illuminated people throughout history have performed penances. Without penance, or breaking the conditionings of life, the new self does not emerge. When you plant a seed in the ground, in the course of time the hard shell has to break in order for it to sprout. The seed has to die before it can give birth to a new sprout. In the same way, the self-oriented perceptions of consciousness also have to die first before the birth of transcendental awareness can take place. These sadhanas are restricted and limited only to paramahansa sannyasins, because they are the people who are able to maintain sanity of mind in times of crisis.

When we confront different tendencies of the mind, it is difficult to keep a balance. That is our situation. We feel destroyed and shattered by the intensity of certain pain and suffering. What happens when one comes face to face with the building blocks of life, such as samskaras, instincts, memories, attachments or associations? To be free from their influence is not easy and it requires an aware and strong mind with willpower. Finding that balance is the secret to life. It is like water-skiing, you have to keep your balance otherwise you fall into the water.

Sri Swamiji is one of those rare people who embarked on this difficult sadhana. His teachings have been twofold. His first teaching was yoga for personal development and growth, and his second teaching is yajna to connect with the environment, nature, the cosmos and people. I see these two as the main teachings of our tradition.

The word yajna does not mean a ritual or a fire ceremony. The literal meaning of the word *yajna* is production, *ya*, distribution, *ja*, and enjoyment, *na*. Yajna presents that aspect of our connection with nature that nourishes life. Socially what we produce is what we distribute and that is what people enjoy. Whether it is grains and food, or an idea, a feeling or a thought, the act of yajna is that from which people derive the maximum fulfilment, happiness and nourishment. Keeping these three things in mind – production, distribution and enjoyment – the system of yajna evolved to bring social

and spiritual unity. Therefore, the tradition says yajna is a celebration of life, nature, creation and God.

Those of you who have been to the Sat Chandi yajnas in India over the years have seen what the components of the yajna are. Mantras are part of the yajna. Their sound vibrations create a power that brings about a positive change in our life, transforming our perception, consciousness and energies for the better. Another component of the yajna is the act of giving, which represents the concept of distribution and enjoyment. A third part of the yajna is the invocation that is being chanted to invoke a specific energy. This is essential because each yajna has a different purpose. It creates a different effect and has a different outcome.

The yajnas that Swami Satyananda is teaching us are the connection with the cosmic creative power. It is the nurturing, sustaining and creative force of the universe. This awakens the shakti, the strength within us. Feminine qualities are the most cherished qualities in life. Even in God we look for love and compassion, sympathy and affection. Everybody wishes to have the experience of God as the nurturing force of life. We don't see God as somebody who is strict and domineering. Religious ideologies can give an impression of a firm, strict, disciplinarian God, but in personal aspiration we all look for a connection which is based on compassion, love, affection and kindness. We are all looking for the soft qualities in God, not the hard ones. The soft quality of God is the most beautiful, a compassionate and all encompassing nature of the divine. This softness is the manifestation of energy, shakti. Shakti can be strong, but at the same time it has softness in it.

Yajna is the invocation of that cosmic power to bring about identification with peace, prosperity and wellbeing in our life. The yajnas provide an opportunity to connect us with our strength and to know that in spirit we are all part of the same universal energy. Yoga and yajna have been the two important gifts that Sri Swamiji has given to all of us. Yoga represents the inner connection and yajna represents the outer connection. It is a balance between the esoteric and exoteric art brought about in life.

In your tradition is there any difference between the teachings given to women and men?

There is no difference between the teachings given to men and those given to women, because yoga practices are universal in nature. Yoga philosophy does not look at the human body as male and female, but as human beings having the same creative potential. So there is no difference in the teachings. Over the last forty years of yoga in the world it has definitely been noticed that women are more sensitive to connecting with their inner spirit and their inner nature. It is easier for them to express and connect with the soft sentiments in life than men. They grow and mature faster in spiritual life. Therefore, our tradition has always encouraged women to develop their potential to the maximum. It has also taught men to keep on walking without stopping for they have a tendency to stop in every tavern they see along the road.

Swami Satyananda is your guru. Can you tell us about your relationship with him? What is your connection with Swami Satyananda?

It is a personal question and I don't know how to answer it. When you ask two people who are in love with each other what the other person is like, what is your reply? What do you feel for that other person? It is just maybe four words, "I love that person." That defines everything and that is the feeling I have for my guru. That's my relationship with him. I love that person!

Is a living guru necessary in one's life?

Definitely. Life is for the living. We can be inspired by dead gurus, no doubt about it, but we need the presence of the living guru to connect us with the teachings of the expired guru. It is just like in society where all the books from first class right up to college are available. So why do you have to go to school and find yourself a teacher when you can simply read the books? Why do you need a living presence to tell you what to do, what to understand, what to write or what to read?

Trying to learn without a teacher is a lopsided idea in social life as well as in spiritual life. Spiritual life has to be lived as you would live social life. For example, you cannot marry Marilyn Monroe. You have to marry somebody who is in front of you. If someone thinks marriage is not necessary for in his mind he is married to Marilyn Monroe, I don't see any solution for that person. To encourage, guide and educate you, you need the presence of a living master. Dead masters can't correct you if you're going in the wrong direction. It is also not their problem. They can't even correct your interpretation of their ideas. Once I was lecturing and I said to the audience, "Be compassionate," and everyone understood it as 'become passionate'. Luckily, I was alive to correct them! Now just imagine the problem if instead of becoming compassionate they all became passionate.

What is God? And what is your favourite star?

What is God? A difficult question. I don't have the answer. The only thing I know is that God is beauty, God is something auspicious, and I know that God is Truth, but I don't have an experience of it. Perhaps when I have more maturity and wisdom I can tell you, but today I am only a searcher and I don't have the answer. It can be inferred that the letter G stands for generation and creation. O stands for organization, maintenance and nurturing, and D stands for destruction, transformation and change. Therefore, my understanding is that God is something which has these three abilities of generation, creation; organization and destruction. This is an intellectual understanding. When it becomes a real understanding, I will let you know.

It is, however, possible to feel the presence of God. When you see a leaf, the greenness of that leaf is God. When you see a rock, the hardness of that rock is God. When you are thirsty and you drink water, the satisfaction is God. When you haven't eaten for many days and are hungry, that hunger is God. When you are experiencing love and nothing else exists, that love is God. God is each and every experience of life. Therefore, be receptive to every experience. With

conviction in oneself and faith in God, who knows, maybe you will discover God before me, and if so let me know.

As for which star I like the most, I like the North Star very much because whenever you look at the North Star from anywhere in the world you'll always know you are looking in the right direction. Secondly, I like another star in the constellation of Capricorn. That star has officially been named Swami Satyananda Saraswati. So whenever you need to be inspired by Sri Swamiji, look up to that star. There is another star in the constellation of Virgo which is called Swami Sivananda, and this is also official. Look at that star and you will be inspired. The wisdom and wholeness of that star will enlighten your life.

These two stars are the inspiring ones in my life, apart from the North Star, because whenever I look up at the sky and I see these three stars I know that the teachings of our masters are always there illuminating our path. There is also another star in the constellation of Aquarius. It is a tiny star, and it is called Swami Niranjan Saraswati. If you happen to identify it, say your good prayers, because you have to remember the constellation of Aquarius is on the opposite side of the other two, which are almost side by side. It is a bit lonely out there in cold dark space, so say your prayers and this will send it warmth and encouragement to await its time.

A year or two ago, one hectare of land was acquired on the moon, and if everything goes well, we shall have the first extra-terrestrial Satyananda Yoga Ashram there. All this has happened, not because we have done it, but because of people who are connected with Sri Swamiji, with Swami Sivananda and the teachings that have flowed down the lineage. People from Canada registered the land on the moon for the Satyananda Yoga Ashram and the well-wishers and devotees from Slovenia have registered the three stars. Each country is trying to recognize the contribution of Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda in a form that can be inspiring and remembered by all.

It is said that the mahavakyas summarize the teachings of Vedanta. Are there any such statements that sum up the teachings of tantra in a nutshell? If not, could you do it for us? In the West the word tantra has a sexual connotation. What do you think of this phenomenon?

To begin with, you have to understand the meaning of the word *tantra*, which is expansion of consciousness and liberation of energy. These two eternal principles have been the main theme of tantra. Yoga is the sadhana or practical aspect of tantra. Tantra is the philosophy and yoga is the process, the means or the practice by which you can experience this life-changing philosophy.

The four great statements of the Vedas, the *mahavakyas*, are indications of a unity of consciousness with the higher self. One of the statements of the Vedas is 'I am that'. 'I am that higher consciousness' is another statement. 'You are that highest consciousness' is yet another statement, and the fourth is 'The knower is that highest consciousness'. These four vedic statements represent the same idea, which indicates a unity of the individual consciousness with the transcendental consciousness, or 'My father and I are one'.

Tantra has the opposite belief. It works with energy and the expression of energy. Four things happen with the awakening of energy: we develop right conduct, we develop appropriate thinking, we perform appropriate actions and we follow the appropriate dharma to uplift us in life. Whereas realization of unity is the culmination of Vedanta, living the appropriate life is the culmination of tantra. These are also the four statements of the tantras: appropriate living, appropriate thinking, appropriate behaviour and adhering to the appropriate dharma.

Western tantrics, not Eastern tantrics, believe in the sexual aspect of tantra. While Western tantrics apply the word tantra to their sexual act to increase and enlarge the moments of pleasure, Eastern tantrics observe sexuality as an instinct which has to be transcended and sublimated. Unfortunately, sublimation does not sell and sex does. The Western tantrics are taken in by that aspect of tantra, and many different tantras have come onto the market.

Eastern tantrics and Indian tantrics see tantra as a way of managing the four basic instincts: *maithuna*, sexuality; *bhaya*, fear; *ahara*, craving and desire, and *nidra*, disconnection, cutting off and isolation. Nidra, the vritti of sleep, is an instinct which disconnects the senses from the outer world and gives relaxation. If one did not sleep, it would be difficult to survive on a day-to-day basis as the senses and the brain would be overloaded. When the pressure builds up, sleep comes in as an antidote to counter that stress pressure. To be able to relax is a matter of instinct, but our way of relaxing is changing and we do not know how to relax. The use of sleeping pills and tranquillizers is an indication of how people are losing their ability to sleep and resorting to artificial means. Sleep is an instinct necessary for the survival of life, but one has to regulate it through awareness and through sadhana.

It is the same with desires and expectations, attachments and wants. Desire is always pregnant. Before a desire dies, it gives birth to another one and so it is always producing more and more of desire's children. There is no end to these desires, but you have to know what is appropriate for you. You may want anything in life, but do you really need it? You have to extract yourself from the force. Management of desires can happen through meditation and reflection.

It is the same with fears and insecurities. The biggest fear in our life is becoming uprooted from our area of comfort. Our associations in the world represent our zones of comfort: husband, wife, children, society, friends and clubs. All these represent our areas of involvement where we find comfort and some connection. Fear always follows change. Fear is an indication of trying to hold on to your comfort zone, and not letting it go. This is something one has to recognize and manage by putting in place proper systems of meditation and reflection.

Sexuality is the fourth instinct. The need to continue with the lineage is natural. The need to propagate life is also natural. Even in nature, plants have that need and they propagate further growth. Animals and insects have that need, but they follow the laws of nature. Human beings have that

need, but they don't follow the laws of nature; they follow the law of their own pleasure. We don't have to look far to see the negative results of these thoughts or actions. Tantra says that there are three purposes to sexuality: pleasure, progeny and sublimation. The majority of people are stuck in the pleasure zone, a good number of people move from the pleasure zone into the progeny zone in the course of time and then they move back into the pleasure zone. Sometimes they move back into the progeny zone eight or nine times, and again have many years in the pleasure zone, but there is no inclination for the sublimation zone.

Western tantrics have exploited the pleasure zone, and Eastern tantrics are teaching the sublimation zone. That is why we don't get many tantrics in India because it is all sublimation. There are more tantrics in the West because it is all pleasure. However, in the real sense, tantra seeks sublimation of the gross energies and reversal of the life-forces from being wasted to being uplifted and raised. That can only happen when you have learned how to control your passions. Western books extol the glories of expressing passion and Eastern books deal with the sublimation of consciousness and energy. Eventually, as people become more and more enlightened and aware, they will look more into the aspect of sublimation as it will give a greater sense of fulfilment, direction and purpose in life.

Awakening Inner Potential

Sofia, Bulgaria, 30–31 May 2008

Yoga is understood and applied differently in the East and the West. For many people around the world, yoga represents either a physical practice or a spiritual discipline. If they consider it to be a physical practice, they relate it to exercises such as aerobics, jogging and swimming, and yoga is a part of that culture. If people believe it is a system of attaining or acquiring mystical, spiritual experiences, they are also misled. From my understanding and study of yoga, I have come to realize that the journey of yoga begins with discovering our own life. We want to live in a nice house, but in order to construct a house we have to dig the ground to create the foundation. We do not create a structure and place it on the ground unless it is only temporary in nature. If we want a permanent structure, we have to go deeper into the ground, create a solid foundation and build from that point on.

The same applies to the practices and theory of yoga. If we create a yogic structure in our life without going deep into our own existence, the experience of yoga is always superficial. Therefore, yoga has to be seen as a system and practice which develops the potentials and creativity of life to the fullest. We can only go in three directions. We want physical health, mental peace and awakening, and social prosperity. Health, peace and prosperity are the three main searches of every individual in society to experience wholeness, completeness and fulfilment. Spiritual experiences are the outcome for one who has acquired physical health, mental peace and social contentment.

While it is true that for many years yoga remained enveloped in a mystical environment, yoga is not a mystical subject. Rather it deals with the development and health of body, mind and spirit. One should have a goal to evolve and develop in yoga. Each practice of yoga gives a particular goal, aim and direction to each branch. You have heard the word 'yoga' and you have also heard of all the different types of yoga contained in the subject of yoga. What are all these yogas for? To have mystical and spiritual experiences only? Or do they give us something more definite to use and apply in our life?

In order to understand yoga you have to set aside your expectations and connect with the realities of life. A blind person wants to see the sun. That desire can be his ambition and aspiration, but it is not his need. His need is to acquire sight, vision. Once sight or vision is obtained, he can see not only the sun but the entire creation. Therefore, one has to leave all the ambitions and expectations of transcendental, mystical, spiritual illumination and begin to work with life, to understand life, to know how to respond to situations and how to manage them more efficiently. The different branches of yoga provide an understanding of a different expression of our nature and personality, and help us find our balance in life.

Hatha yoga to balance the body

The hatha yoga system is for the elimination of toxins and impurities from the body. The hatha yoga practices remove blockages and stiffness from the body. Balance in physical performance and harmony in the functioning of the various organs and systems of the body is the aim of hatha yoga. People find that the simple hatha yoga practices give total optimum health. Health is a stress-free condition of the body. Illness is a distressed condition of the body. When we suffer from either hypertension or insomnia, or if we develop physical problems like respiratory, cardiac or endocrinal disorders, hatha yoga becomes an effective tool to intervene and manage those distressed conditions of the body.

Modern medicine is less than a hundred years old. The concept of medicine as emergency aid started with the discovery of penicillin during the First World War. Since then the allopathic system has been a system of crisis management for the body. It recognizes that it cannot regulate distress and imbalances in the body for which regulation of lifestyle is necessary. If we have hypertension, we take medication to lower our blood pressure, but that is not developing the strength and immunity of the body to deal with that crisis. If somebody has a respiratory problem, they use a bronchial dilator spray to open up the bronchial passages and the lungs so there is ease in breathing, but the constriction returns after the effect of the medicine wears off. Do we depend all the time on bronchial dilators, or can we improve the condition of our body to breathe more freely and use emergency crisis management medicines less and less?

Many medical institutions and doctors are looking into the effects of yoga for they realize that help is not attained through pills, medications and vitamin tablets, but by living a more balanced, regulated life. Therefore, along with medication, yoga becomes an effective tool to manage distressful conditions that are encountered on a day-to-day basis. Once we have regulated our life, we can gradually reduce the medication and even come off it. Regulating our life happens because we have become aware of ourselves. The hatha yoga systems and practices help us to become aware of our body.

Raja yoga to manage the mind

Similarly, raja yoga is commonly understood by people in the West as meditative yoga, but raja yoga deals with the management of mental imbalances. The mind is a subject that we have ignored so far in our life. Society tells us to use the mind only to think about how we are going to prosper in material life. The education system trains the mind to acquire certain skills with which we can survive in society, but we are never taught anywhere how to relax the stresses of the mind, how to manage the dissipated aspects of our

thinking, behaviour and personality. However, from the yogic perspective, the mind is the centre of life. If we can manage our mind, we can be successful in material life and successful in our personal discovery of ourselves. The basic philosophy of raja yoga is acquiring the ability to manage the fluctuating modifications and moods of the mind. Raja yoga becomes a system for realizing the mind.

Bhakti yoga for emotions, karma yoga for creativity

The third aspect is bhakti yoga, which people call the yoga of devotion. However, bhakti yoga is the yoga of emotional management, not the yoga of devotion. Just as raja yoga is mind management and hatha yoga is body management, in the same manner bhakti yoga is emotional management.

The fourth and least known aspect of yoga, yet the most important, is karma yoga. People say karma yoga is working hard, but in reality karma yoga is connecting with our creativities and expressing them in the best manner possible, so the interactive aspect of life becomes rich and our performance becomes conducive to the attainment of health, peace and wealth. There are many other yogas which have a definite aim. The practice of yoga should be integrated in the life of every individual.

Integral yoga

Our body is a system which functions in harmony with all the other components of our body-mind unit. If the strings of a guitar are not tuned, there will be no sound. If you tune one string only, you cannot create a melody or music. Some people only work with their body, one string of the guitar. Some people try to tune two strings, body and mind, but somehow they are not in harmony. Some people tune the third one also, body, mind and emotion. The sound becomes a little better, but it is not yet the final sound. Very few people tune the fourth string, the creative connection with life. When all four strings are properly tuned, a harmonious melody can be created.

In this yogic process we see a combination of physical, mental, emotional and creative components. The word *yoga*

means harmony or union in these four areas of existence. Many philosophers claim that yoga is the union of an individual person and God, but this is only an abstract, philosophical understanding, a distant reality in our life. Why have I come to yoga? I did not come to yoga to attain self-realization. I did not come to yoga to experience samadhi. I came to yoga so I could tune the strings of my guitar. I ask you also to develop this understanding. It is like a blind person acquiring vision or sight. Acquiring knowledge and understanding is our journey into yogic life.

From yoga practice to yoga sadhana

Yoga can be seen from four perspectives. The first perspective is yoga practice. Once a week you go to a centre, learn some exercises, some breathing, relaxation and concentration and then you are off. If you are able to connect with your body, if you are able to connect with yourself, you feel relaxed. You say yoga is a wonderful practice and you will come back next week. So you practise yoga once or twice a week at the centre in order to feel good after the practice. Such people are called temporary practitioners of yoga. Some people like to watch their body stretching in the mirror to see whether they are straight or not. Some people create complicated practices to believe that they can do something complex and important. When people ask when they can learn to do the headstand, I tell them, “First learn to stand on your feet before you learn to stand on your head!”

Some people create an imaginative philosophy that certain things can happen and they block out everything in order to experience what they have decided for themselves. When we gear ourselves to experience something specific, we definitely block all the other experiences which help in our transformation. Therefore, one should know the realities of life, the realities of the personality and try to manage them. If you are hungry, you have to get your meal and eat it to satisfy your hunger. Sitting in meditation with eyes closed and thinking, “I am not hungry, I am not hungry, I am not hungry” will not help in any way. That’s what many people do. Maybe

they don't meditate on hunger, but they meditate on similar things which are more abstract and difficult to achieve.

Somebody once asked our guru, Swami Satyananda, "Is yoga the way to self-realization? Is it possible to realize God through yoga?" He categorically said, "No, it is not possible to attain self-realization or God-realization through yoga." Then he was asked, "Why does everybody think they can be realized with the practice of meditation and yoga?" He replied, "People who think that have mental problems." Then he was asked again, "Why? Even the yogic literatures indicate realization of the divine inside," and he explained that our mind is conditioned in this world. These conditionings create barriers around the expressions of life. There are social, cultural, religious barriers and personal barriers, which limit the expression of our true nature. We are confined by many conditionings. In this confined state of experience, how can we experience the vast transcendental nature? The mind is not transcendental, so how can that non-transcendental mind understand or grasp the transcendental existence?

You have to deal with the day-to-day expressions of life to improve them. This will happen when you begin to follow the aim indicated in yoga for personal attainment. If you are able to connect fully with your creativity, you become a karma yogi. If you are able to manage the fluctuations of the mind and bring out the potential of the mind, you become a raja yogi. If you are able to harness the strength and power of your sentiments and emotions, you become a bhakti yogi. If you are able to connect with your body and attain physical purity, you become a hatha yogi. The person who follows the aim indicated by yoga is not a yoga practitioner but a yoga sadhaka. A sadhaka tries to perfect the state of experience. A sadhaka has acquired excellence in what he does. Therefore, yoga practice is your choice of practice, yoga sadhana is the yogic choice of practice.

Yogic lifestyle and yogic culture

The third aspect is yogic lifestyle. In order to truly live and imbibe yoga, the practice of yoga sadhana has to be

combined with lifestyle. Only then can you harmonize your environment, manage your routine efficiently and remain free from accumulating distress.

The fourth component is cultivating yogic culture in the family, society and environment. Appropriate application of the yogic practices to enhance one's ability is the hallmark of the Satyananda Yoga system. Once you adopt the yogic lifestyle and yoga sadhana, life becomes a smooth journey. Yoga has taught me to live life, to laugh in life and to love in life. Ultimately, that is real yoga – to live life, to laugh in life and to love life.

The possibilities for human development are enormous. Here is an example. You are walking along the road, lost in thought, when somebody brushes against you. In a research study people were asked, "Did you see the person who brushed against you?" and each one said no. They were then taken through a process of relaxation and afterwards they were asked, "Can you now describe the person who brushed against you?" They began to describe the person, his height, clothing, and gradually the image of that person would appear in their mind. This indicates that many things we are not even aware of are happening to us. We think we are conscious people, but we are not really conscious. We live the mental experience of many dimensions. We live at the conscious, subconscious and unconscious levels. At a conscious level we only know that somebody has brushed against our body. As we relax and go deeper into the subconscious, we can identify and visualize the person because the subconscious captures every moment we experience. This can happen to any one of us. We can recognize, identify and visualize what is happening without consciously being aware.

When we go through the gradual discovery of the mind and the mental faculties, we develop our potentials in life. The message is to connect not with imaginative abstract ideas, but to realize the present and how we can make the effort to improve the present. This will be the beginning of a satisfying yogic journey.

Experiencing Yoga

Sofia, Bulgaria, 30–31 May 2008

I do not represent political India, rich India, poor India or tourist India. I represent spiritual India, yoga India. Today yoga is emerging from India, and I feel fortunate to be part of a tradition and a lineage that has thought of the welfare of humanity, which has always made the effort to teach the individual how to bring out the best they have within themselves. Yoga is not a new word in the world; people have heard the name ‘yoga’ in many contexts. Yoga can be better understood by looking at the applications, philosophy and aspirations of yoga.

Our yogic journey begins many thousands of years ago. Once upon a time, yoga was a worldwide culture. Evidence of this has been found in the ancient cultures of South America, Scandinavia, Africa and Asia. We have found statues portraying traditional yoga postures dating back five thousand years and descriptions of the yogic concepts of kundalini and chakras in many parts of the world. We can infer that once upon a time, the subject of yoga was well known to human society. Due to natural calamities, famines, migrations, wars and political changes, yoga disappeared from other parts of the globe.

However, yoga was preserved in India by a group of dedicated people known as sannyasins, a tradition I am part of. These sannyasins lived in isolation in the mountains, in the caves and jungles, perfecting their own understanding of life, the universe and yoga. When the time was appropriate,

it was the duty of these people to bring yoga back to society and to again make humanity aware of this beautiful heritage given to us by our ancients to improve the quality of our life. Therefore, although yoga is a subject, dating back many thousands of years, its place in modern history is only about forty or fifty years old.

When yoga was first propagated in the West as well as in India, it was always thought to be part of an Eastern mystical tradition. Even today in many places people continue to believe that it is a part of Indian mysticism or Indian religion. However, there is a big difference between religion and religious efforts, and spirituality and spiritual realization. Religion is a structured system of belief and communicational interaction with the entity called God. Spirituality is developing better contact with our inner strength and qualities. Spirituality means coming in closer contact with our inner nature so we can experience the beauty of life. Spirituality represents an exploration of the human nature, personality and use of the qualities and strengths in order to become a complete human being. Becoming this complete human being does not indicate a state of realization; rather it indicates that we have acquired excellence to survive in life with creativity and wisdom. Yoga has been considered to be a spiritual science which allows us to explore the deeper layers of human nature and consciousness.

Tantra – consciousness and energy

Yoga is part of a system of life called tantra. People in the West have understood tantra as a way to express their sexuality and as a means to expand the pleasure periods in life, but that is only a Western concept. Eastern cultures don't have this concept, because for us tantra has always represented the theoretical and philosophical aspect of life and consciousness. Yoga has represented the practical approach to access the deeper levels of consciousness. The word tantra is made up of two words, *tan*, which means to expand, to open up, to enlarge, and *tra*, which means to liberate, to free, to give expression.

Expansion of human consciousness is the first component of the word tantra, and liberation and positive, creative expression of the dormant human potentials is the second component. Before creation, consciousness and energy were the only two powers or forces existing in the universe. These two forces were in harmony with each other. However, in the course of time modifications took place in the states of consciousness and energy and with each modification in the pure state of consciousness and energy, a different creation evolved. Tantra says that these modifications, transformations or changes in the realm of consciousness and energy are represented in our personality, in our body, in our nature, in the form of centres which represent an altered state of expression of consciousness and energy.

The electricity generated in a powerhouse has a high voltage which has to be converted to a usable form of energy before it can be used. As the capacity or potency of the instrument is increased, the voltage also has to increase. The same has happened with us. We have not been able to experience the pure nature of either consciousness or energy in our lifetime. If household appliances are using 220 volts and 440 volts begins to flow, everything will burn out and fuse. The same will happen with us if we begin to experience this higher form of consciousness and energy; our body, our mind, our brain will short-circuit and fuse. At our level, the manifestation of consciousness and energy is comparable to the 220 current, which allows us to survive in this material, sensorial world. That is the frequency of our consciousness and energy.

Tantra has always recognized that it is possible to increase our capacities, to develop the experience of consciousness, to tap into the sources of energy in our life and to use them for development and growth. That process is taught in yoga. Therefore, yoga is an offshoot or a branch of tantra, a practical, applied branch of tantra.

Yoga – head, heart and hands

The word *yoga* means union, bringing together the dissipated fractions of our nature and personality. My grandfather

guru, Swami Sivananda Saraswati, was a medical doctor. He was a knower of the body, the mind, tantra and yoga. He was a scientist of both the external and internal. He used to say that during their lifetime, every human being expresses the qualities of head, heart and hands. Head represents the intellectual abilities, heart represents the emotional abilities and hands represent the creative abilities. It is understood that if we lack any one of these three abilities, we are not a well-off human being; there is some deficiency in us. If we have emotional sensitivity and creative ability but not intellectual ability, we do not succeed in life. If we do not have emotional sensitivity but have the other two, still we do not succeed in life. If we do not have creative ability but have intellectual ability and emotional sensitivity, we are unable to progress in life.

Even science speaks about these three different abilities inherent in every human being. In my generation young people were concerned with improvement of the IQ, intelligence quotient, but now people talk about EQ, emotional quotient. Having the highest IQ is not an indication of success in life if one lacks emotional quotient, EQ. Apart from EQ, there is also the social quotient, SQ. IQ represents the faculties of the head, intellect, EQ represents the faculties of the heart and SQ represents the faculties of creativity, performance, interaction in society and life. These are the three areas of our experience which have to be integrated. Whether we think from the perspective of Swami Sivananda, integration of head, heart and hands, or from the modern perspective of IQ, EQ and SQ, the theory, philosophy and practice is the same, called yoga.

Yoga removes distress

One of the main reasons for yoga's acceptance in society is that it helps to remove distress from our life. Distress is the cause of pain, suffering and dissatisfaction in life. Life can only exist when there is stress, but if there is too much stress, it changes into distress and a break in the personality happens. Stress is good, distress is bad. We have learned how to manage these

levels of stress, physical, psychological, emotional, so that they are not converted into states of distress, depression and anxiety. The frustrations and difficulties that people face today are due to distress, which is caused by intensive participation in the outer world. We are indoctrinated from early in life through education, through society, through our culture, to perform, succeed and be prosperous in life. In schools, colleges and universities we receive professional education, equipping ourselves with tools and skills by which we can sustain ourselves and support social development. However, teaching is never given as to how we can increase and enhance the qualities and potentials of life. In the spiritual system this education is given through yoga, so that we can manage our changing perceptions and conditions of mind in a better way.

Improving the quality of life

There are four major components of the human personality that have to be regulated: strength, weakness, ambition and need. These four items represent the behaviour of our personality, mind and interaction in society with people. The problem is that we begin to identify with our weaknesses and not our strengths, and then the world becomes a grim, dark place. We begin to develop a sense of guilt and an inability to express ourselves properly. After all in our own mind we have two powers, good and bad. If we are trying to achieve something, we make every effort to acquire and achieve it. In the case of failure we begin to identify with our weaknesses and feel depressed and dejected. The idea of failure is further enforced by this state of mind, and we are not able to connect with our positivity, our strengths. Depression, anxiety and frustration set in. What happened to our strength, optimism and clarity of mind which can easily take us beyond these minor, temporary influences?

The same happens with our ambitions and needs. It is difficult to identify our ambitions and needs. Sometimes our ambition becomes our need, but actually our needs are very basic to sustain and nourish life. If we need a car, we buy one according to the capacity of our pocket, a second-hand one,

an old one, a new one or the best one. We are fulfilling our need at that time. If we want to improve our status, we always look at bigger and better things which other people do not have, and that is our ambition. There is always confusion as to what our need is and what our ambition is, as and to what our strengths are and how to manage our weaknesses. These areas of our personality have to be understood first in order to improve the quality of life. The process of yoga begins by making us aware of our own selves. It allows us to explore how we function in life and how we can develop the dormant, hidden potentials within us.

Today science tells us that human beings around the globe are using about one-tenth of the entire capacity of the brain, and the remaining centres of the brain are dormant, inactive. Similarly, psychologists tell us that we are aware of only a limited area of our mental faculties and expressions. That is the conscious level. We are not aware of what happens at the subconscious or the unconscious levels. Yoga makes the attempt to access these other dormant areas of the brain, to awaken them and to use their power to enhance our abilities and creativities.

A lot of work has taken place around the world to find out how the applications of yoga can improve the quality of life and the individual. You might think that yoga is a technique which you practise in the yoga centre under the guidance of a teacher for one or two hours every day or maybe once a week or twice a week. You have to remember that food is necessary for the development and sustenance of the body. If you don't eat for a week, you will feel weakness, less strength, stamina and vitality. So in order to maintain a level of health and wellbeing you need to have food on a regular basis. In the same manner happiness is necessary for the wellbeing of the mind. If one is unhappy, the mind becomes sick. When one is happy, the mind becomes optimistic, positive and creative. So you have to try to maintain a happy state of mind on a daily basis to express your positivity and optimism.

In the same manner, yoga is necessary in order to maintain and nourish the creative potentials of life. This has to become

a natural part of the routine. When yoga becomes natural, there is a meaning to the practice. As long as it is not natural and remains a classroom teaching it is only a one or two-session affair with yoga every week. If you have a boyfriend or a girlfriend, you don't see them once a week, but every day or whenever you have the opportunity because you enjoy being in their presence. When you are in love with your own spirit, you also have to make the attempt to be with it every moment possible. In this manner yoga becomes a part of our routine and life.

Social applications of yoga

We have experimented with yoga in different stratas of society. By looking at the social applications of yoga and then at the practices, we can see the relevance of yoga in society and in our life. Yoga is applied in society to regulate the strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs, to develop the qualities of head, heart and hands – IQ, EQ and SQ, and manage distress levels.

We teach yoga in prisons around the world. In India, Europe, in the Americas, and in Australia, yoga has become part of the routine in many prisons. Not as part of their physical exercise, aerobics and gym, but as a way to pacify their mental agitations which they experience in the form of fear, aggression, revenge and guilt. This high distress level in the personality causes a lot of pain and suffering.

In India we did a survey of seventy thousand prisoners and found that yoga was able to help eighty percent to overcome their disturbed mental conditions. The overall feeling was that there was a great reduction in aggression, guilt, feelings of revenge, insecurity and fear, and a greater identification with the feeling of peace, forgiveness and wellbeing which they attained through the practices of yoga.

We teach yoga in schools and colleges to children and students. In fact, the work with young people is one of the main efforts of the Satyananda Yoga system. In Europe there is a big movement teaching yoga to children in schools. We train teachers, who in turn give yoga training to students in

the classroom environment, one posture and one breathing technique in every class. This reduces the stress level of the student, improves concentration, memory and retention power and they are able to excel in their studies with less effort.

We teach the principles of yoga therapy in medical colleges. Yoga and modern medicine complement each other very well. The modern medical system is emergency intervention to manage a disturbed condition of body or mind, but after the crisis has been averted we come to yoga to regulate our lifestyle and to be free from the influences of illnesses and diseases.

We teach yoga in corporate houses, industries and factories to increase efficiency, and they have greatly benefited from yogic intervention. Health, individual performance and mental clarity have improved, and there are fewer problems between the unions and the administration. We teach yoga to armies around the world to help the soldiers manage mental conflicts and pressures in a better way. There are many chapters in the book of life. Satisfaction is one chapter, distress is another, war and conflict is another, harmony and regulation is another chapter in the book of life. We are not saying, "Avoid war through the practice of yoga." We are using yoga to help young people overcome mental problems and pressures.

Yoga is also being used as a therapeutic process by many hospitals and doctors. Management of various psychosomatic illnesses is possible through yogic intervention. Yoga has helped people with hypertension, asthma, diabetes, cancer, HIV and AIDS. Health does not mean absence of disease from the body or mind, but acquiring the ability to manage distressful conditions in a better way. Yoga has been an effective tool in the management of many physiological and psychological illnesses and disorders. In this manner yoga is being included and integrated in many other areas of life.

Integral yoga

What is yoga and how do we practise it? There are many schools in the world with their own brand of yoga. Many

people focus and concentrate only on physical development through yoga. Many people focus on the meditative aspect of yoga to attain a new type of inner, mental experience. Many people become prophets overnight with eyes on profit. Each one teaches yoga according to their understanding, expectation, ambition and circumstances. The best form of yoga is an integrated form, as advocated by Swami Sivananda and as propagated by our guru, Swami Satyananda.

When we paint a face, we paint the eyes, nose, mouth, ears and the face in the correct dimensions to bring out the image of a face. I see those people who practise physical yoga only as working with their nose, which becomes longer and longer. I see people who practise meditative yoga with enlarged heads, their faces becoming smaller and their heads becoming bigger. I see people advocating the mystical side of yoga with huge eyes and no face. If we want to paint a recognizable face, all the parts have to be in proportion. That is the approach of integral yoga.

What is integral yoga? A few postures for the body, a few breathing techniques to increase the vitality and stamina of the body, a little bit of relaxation to remove the accumulated tensions of the day and a little bit of meditation to connect with inner positivity and strength. Each item has to be in proportion. If we add a kilo of salt to a kilo of vegetables, it will destroy the vegetables completely, but if we cook normally and naturally with a little bit of salt, with more water, with a little bit of oil, with more vegetables, it will be tasty. For food to be tasty, the items have to be in the correct proportions. The same principle applies to yoga. People are attracted by the performance of postures, but from the yogic perspective only five postures need to be practised daily for complete wellness of the body. If you want to practise anything beyond that, you are free to do so, but from the yogic perspective only five postures are required.

Swami Satyananda has always advocated that yoga be practised on a regular basis in the daily routine. This is his perspective of how yoga can be lived and experienced in normal life. Yoga works at the physical, psychological and

spiritual levels. To manage distressful conditions of the body, the practice of postures is a must. To increase the stamina and vitality of the body, we practise breathing techniques. Only two breathing techniques are important. The effect is to balance the motor and sensory nervous systems, the sympathetic and the parasympathetic. The activity of the left and right hemispheres of the brain is also regulated. Concentration and one-pointedness of mind is achieved. Nervous tension can be alleviated by practising the breathing techniques.

The third component is learning how to relax. Unfortunately people have forgotten how to relax and how to sleep, and have to use tranquillizers and sleeping tablets. It seems that we are losing our mental balance and harmony and becoming more and more dependent on external agents to help us relax and sleep.

The fourth component is the practice of concentration and meditation to explore our personality and nature and to come into contact with our strengths and positivity. These four forms of yoga constitute the practices applicable and useful for every individual in human society.

Light the lamp of yoga

Yoga gives us the opportunity to light our own candle to illuminate the darkness of our lives. The darkness which has remained in a subterranean cave for thousands of years can be instantly removed by lighting a lamp. Yoga gives us the opportunity to light this lamp in our life to remove the darkness, so that the dormant areas of the brain and mind begin to function more efficiently and effectively, and we connect with the humanness within us. We are humans, but in body only, not in character, not in nature, not in personality. Many people have realized this and said that we are social animals. With yoga we have an opportunity to experience the humanness within. Therefore, give yoga, evolution, peace and creativity a chance in your life.

Satsang on Spiritual Life

Sofia, Bulgaria, 30–31 May 2008

Is there a link between ancient India and Bulgaria?

The history of western civilization began a few thousand years ago. Many other civilizations came and went before that, so humanity has existed for several thousand years. Historians in India have written books on history dating back fifteen to twenty thousand years. According to history, about 5,500 years ago there was a massive civil war in India. This battle is narrated in the epic *Mahabharata*. Two warring factions led by powerful kings with large armies fought a great battle. Whenever there is strife or civil war, mass migrations take place. About 5,500 years ago there was a mass exodus from India to western regions, settling in Hungary, Bulgaria and other Eastern European countries. Whenever migrations take place, people bring their memories of past locations and a part of their culture. They also identify places in the new country with names of the places they have left behind.

The book, *Bulgaria, the Land of Daksha*, shows the link between ancient India and Bulgaria. Yantra is the name of a river. It is not a Bulgarian name. There is an Om peak in Bulgaria. Due to language and pronunciation the syllable has changed, but it is the same thing. Similarly, there is a place called Samadhi in Hungary. In this manner, there are rivers, mountains and locations which have Sanskrit roots. Daksha in India is like Adam in the West. He was the progenitor of humanity. When mass migrations took place, people migrated with memories which can be seen

today in Bulgaria. So we are distant cousins. Over a period of time the language, customs, culture, ideas, lifestyle and beliefs changed, but even today, those memories from the past linger on in the form of names which have lost their meaning.

Yantra is a geometrical figure, like the Tibetan mandalas and Hindu yantras. Yantras are used to explore different levels of consciousness. *Yana* means vehicle, and *tra* means use of. The yantras used today in India represent maps of human consciousness. With understanding of yantras we can go deep into consciousness and explore it. Yantra means not only the vehicle of consciousness, but a process of personal discovery.

A river represents this concept in a most beautiful way. The nature of a river is to overcome all obstructions and obstacles and to keep on flowing. It will make its own course through stony mountainous regions and through the plains. The ultimate destiny of a river is to merge with the sea or the ocean, and the destiny of human consciousness is to merge with the supreme consciousness. Yantra means discovering the source, the journey towards the source. Yantra symbolizes the consciousness which keeps on flowing eternally like a river.

How do we learn to awaken love in us and spread it around?

Love and compassion have no meaning if they are devoid of understanding. The biggest quality in life is not love, it is understanding, opening up the mind and heart through understanding. When you understand, you appreciate. When you appreciate, you love. Love comes with a companion, compassion. So to say 'awaken love' has no meaning. We have all experienced love in our lives without understanding. Two people are in love, but they don't understand each other, and when passion subsides, misunderstandings arise. That love is purely an expression of passion, it is not true love. If somebody loves someone, they hug each other, live together, but that is not the love we are trying to spread around the globe. What we need in life is understanding. That's all. With understanding, everything will come naturally and

spontaneously. I love all of you but it is not necessary for me to live with you. The relationship that we have is based on something much deeper than love. It is based on understanding. Understanding is the primary requirement of humanity. If there is no understanding, conflicts, confusion and separation will prevail. Without understanding, love dies a premature death. Therefore, I don't speak on love, I speak on understanding.

Women, yoga, love, sex, children – how can all these be integrated in yogic life?

Remember that you are free to cook anything, but in order to bring taste to food, you have to always put in a pinch of salt. So live your life with your family and friends, have many children, enjoy yourself, but always put a pinch of yoga salt in the food you cook. Therefore, adopt yoga in your routine and lifestyle.

Remember that you are not practising yoga to be different from other people, to project yourself as a better person, a holy person or as a spiritual person. You are practising yoga to enrich the quality of your life. If this happens, relationships become better. Children will receive better impressions and better education from you. Children are not educated in schools. Academic learning in schools and colleges develops the intellect, but the personality, character and mentality, are imbibed from the family environment. If there is support, cooperation and understanding in the family, children will have a different personality, mentality and behaviour.

Until they begin formal education at the age of six or seven, children imbibe and gain knowledge through their environment, family and culture, and they acquire the basic building blocks of their personality. Until the age of eight, children are like sponges, untainted by the influences of the material world and the negativities, confusions and conflicts that arise in the family. Once formal education begins, the mind is diverted to the intellectual and academic pattern. The character and personality stop forming and developing when formal education begins.

Yoga is only an ingredient which we use to enrich our family and social life. So live naturally. Don't worry about relationships, about children, about sex, about women and men. With yoga, improve your relationships and develop your personality with better understanding of each other, the partner and children, and you will become a yogi in the course of time.

How can we find our true purpose in life?

You don't have to find your true purpose in life; you have to know your true purpose in life. Since you have been given this life, make the best of it. Excel in everything that you do. There has to be excellence in performance, in behaviour, in passion, in compassion, in understanding. In every walk of life, in every action, try to develop excellence. That is the true purpose of life.

What is the purpose for the existence of the variety of religions in the world? The destination is Sofia. If you are coming from Germany, you take a flight from there and land in Sofia. If you are coming from India, you take a flight from there and land in Sofia. If you are coming from Slovenia or Greece, you have to take a flight from there and land in Sofia. There is one destination but many routes, depending on where you live. There cannot be one route. If I am living in Hungary and I have to travel to London and then to Frankfurt to come to Sofia, it is a very long route.

Each civilization and each culture developed a plan of connecting with the supreme power. That plan was only a lifestyle, remember this. Christ gave a blueprint for spiritual advancement. Remember that he was not a Christian. Christianity was officially established as a religion many years after his death. Buddha gave a blueprint for spiritual advancement. He was not a Buddhist, he was a Hindu. Many years after his death, Buddhism was officially established as a separate religion, philosophy, belief. This happened the world over, even in India. Therefore, there are a variety of organized systems of religion. When we organize something, the original teachings are hidden behind the rules, discipline and dogmas.

There is no single way to the supreme self. When you undertake a journey, it begins not at the airport, but the moment you leave home. You follow a route to reach the airport and then take a specific flight to reach your destination, and when you reach your destination, you are satisfied. Originally religions represented a blueprint for discovering our relationship with the higher self. Later on, social customs and the prevailing mentality were added to this spiritual blueprint, and they became the religion.

What are the customs which have become a part of religion? One simple example will clarify a point. The land where Christianity was born was a desert. The land where Islam was born was a desert. When somebody died, the body was buried under the ground. It is a social custom. In places where there were plenty of trees the body was burnt so that disease, bacteria, viruses and germs did not pollute the earth. That is an ancient custom. Now it has become part of a religious system. Christians want to be buried because that is the culture and tradition they believe in. Hindus want to be burnt because they believe in that. We all believe that what we are doing is according to our religious precepts and doctrines. A social custom became a part of religion and we began to think that it was demanded by the religion. There are hundreds of customs that have become part of religion. The different mentalities and social systems become part of the philosophy, the philosophy recedes into the background and the customs are highlighted.

We need to understand religion in the form of a blueprint, not in the form of customs that have to be followed. India has always had freedom of expression, so only philosophies developed, never religions. Each enlightened being can challenge a philosophy and say, "I find this to be incorrect, I find this to be correct" and start a new discovery. Instead of one religion in India, there are about thirty philosophies. Tantra is a philosophy. Yoga is a philosophy. Vedanta and Samkhya are philosophies. Even Shaivism and Shaktism are philosophies. They are not religions. We don't have a social identity in India. Those who live in Bulgaria are called

Bulgarians and have one lifestyle, one mentality and one aspiration. We don't have a national identity in India.

The word Hindu was given by the Persian and Greeks who came to India. Whether they came from the East or the West, they had to cross the river Indus, so people who lived beyond the river were called Hindus. Our civilization was the Indus valley civilization and we were called Aryans. Our race is Aryan. Our philosophies are many, not one religion. We have always had freedom of expression, so we could debate different matters and come to a balanced conclusion. If we were enlightened and had a set of experiences, we could create our own philosophy. Outsiders called us Hindus because they were unable to grasp the variety of philosophies in India. They placed everything under the Hindu religion. Nevertheless religions represent a blueprint of discovering the supreme. We should try to understand the blueprints and see how we can use them to enhance our own life.

Is it good to have role models?

Who are your models? Many have film stars as their role models. Many have successful and prosperous people as their role models. In my life, my role model has been my guru. The guru is not your role model, because if a guru was your role model, you would be sitting in my place.

Is it possible to practise yoga and be a Christian at the same time?

I know many true Christians who practise yoga. Many priests and nuns practise yoga. When I ask them, "How does yoga help you?" they say, "We understand our religion and philosophy in a much better way than before." It is the Christian world which has supported yoga till today. Many Islamic countries have yoga. Our books on yoga are published in Iran and are distributed openly with the official sanction of the Department of Culture. Our teachers and sannyasins have travelled in these countries and given lectures and classes on the teachings of yoga. Every year people from Islamic countries visit Munger and Rikhia. Yoga

does not contradict any belief or creed, please remember that. On the contrary, it allows you to understand your own belief and faith with a different perspective and therefore there is no conflict.

What is it like being a guru? What does a guru feel and think? What are a guru's dreams?

It is a difficult job to be a guru. Guru is like the dust bin of humanity. People dump all their problems and tensions on the guru. The guru becomes the doctor, the marriage consultant, the child psychologist, guru becomes everything. That is why I say people make gurus into a dust bin, but in that dust bin everything is burnt away. Just as fire remains unaffected by what is thrown in it, so is the nature of the guru.

What is the expectation of the guru? What is the expectation of a teacher? That the students will follow the instructions, practise them and excel in their life. When Einstein became a scientist, imagine how his teacher felt? The teachings he received from the guru enabled Einstein to become one of the greatest scientists. If your consciousness can take a new birth every day, that is the most satisfying thing that can happen to a teacher.

As far as the other questions are concerned, the answer is simple. In order to know me, don't look at what I eat or what I drink or what I wear. In order to know me, you have to know what I believe in, what I think, how I think and how I am able to inspire others. So don't look at the physical, but look at the energy that is transmitted.

How does a guru live in the world? Arjuna asked Sri Krishna, "How does an enlightened being live in the world?" and Sri Krishna answered, "Just like an ordinary person."

2009

Rocklyn Yoga Ashram, Victoria, Australia

10–14 April

Mangrove Yoga Ashram, NSW, Australia

16–20 April



Evolution of Consciousness

From Head to Heart

The purpose of an ashram is not to be a yoga centre, but to be a centre for learning about life, to improve the understanding of life and to interact with life with greater clarity, positivity, creativity and optimism. These are the things that make one successful outside and happy and content inside. Life is interconnected; we are not independent units. Life manifests in many forms and we are part of that experience and process. To give an example, Hindus say that life begins and culminates after going through many, many stages of experience which we gain in different forms, from bacteria to human being. There are 8,400,000 forms of life in which consciousness manifests. Life is an experience of evolving consciousness, nothing more than that.

When you go to school, you put yourself through a process of education to deepen your understanding and awareness of the environment, the world. You learn how you can excel in your life by adopting a profession and by having different skills. By doing this, you are boosting your intellect. One component of consciousness, *buddhi*, intellect, is being stimulated by normal education. When intellect is applied outside, it makes us part of the world, and it is when applied inside, it makes us part of the transcendental nature of which we are an extension.

Awakening consciousness

From the Hindu perspective, life is an ongoing process of gaining more and more experience and awakening the

consciousness, that's all. Therefore, the original philosophies that developed on the Indian subcontinent such as Tantra, Samkhya and Vedanta defined a definite process for realizing one's nature, mind and inner potentials. Samkhya is the most ancient philosophy, the original philosophy, to define the different stages of experience from transcendental to gross. The entire subject of tantra deals with the unmanifest consciousness and the manifest expressions of that consciousness. The entire subject of Vedanta deals with enhancing the sensitivity of human consciousness to experience the transcendental in this life. The ancient philosophies were not religious by nature. They were based on observations of the process of life. After deep reflection, contemplation and realization, the investigators, called rishis, sages and visionaries, came to the conclusion that there is no God outside. One begins to identify with the divine, transcendental nature as one's consciousness evolves.

The idea of the transcendental nature was carried forward by religions, which said that the transcendental nature has three qualities: generation, organization and destruction, creation, maintenance and transformation. These three qualities represent the power of the transcendental nature as God: G – generation, O – organization, D – destruction. This idea of God was further developed by other religions as they grew and as they dissolved. According to Swami Satyananda, we have come a long way from the past and now a new perception of life has to develop. This perception of life should not be based on past theories, because human consciousness has evolved and is at a different stage, so new ideas arise.

Religions had to resort to God in order to survive, to propagate and to exist. How they saw God was their perception. Some saw God in trees, in nature, some saw God in heaven, some saw God on earth. However, Buddhism took the form of a religion without God as the foundation. It said that life is important. Overcome suffering, find peace within and in that peace you will discover God inside you. Buddha was born five hundred years before Christ. The other systems

of thought that have continued to inspire people today are Tantra, Samkhya, Yoga and Vedanta because they deal with life. It is important to understand that evolution is of life only, and God is realized in life only.

Consciousness evolves in life

There is a point in time when life begins and there is a point in time when life ends. You have that period in between to experiment with yourself. In this normal lifespan of eighty or eighty-five years, forty years is spent sleeping. So you are active for a total of forty years, one-third of which is spent eating. About fifteen percent of the remaining time is spent on vacation, going to the beach, the mountains, the countryside to enjoy yourself and relax. You are extroverted at that time. If you analyze the entire life process, the effort you put into personal development is cumulatively only about ten years. How long have you been involved with yoga and how much have you been able to decondition yourself? If you are objective, you should feel guilty at having wasted so much time. That is the truth, the reality.

The systems which came into existence in the past, after deep thought, show a process through which you can come to a point of being at peace with yourself, if the process is followed thoroughly and truly. This was Buddha's intention, too, when he said, "Overcome the suffering in life first." If you are able to manage your life creatively, evolution will take place, but if you are stuck in a thought or a situation, your journey stops there. Therefore, we believe in reincarnation because of the continuity of the development of consciousness from a gross, material consciousness, which is unable to perceive, realize or know anything, to a point where one is aware of oneself, nature, the universe and the connection that exists between them. That is the quantum leap of consciousness.

That is the end of the human journey. After that, another journey begins in a different form, in the form of *devas*, illumined beings. It doesn't mean not having a body. We can have this body and still be a deva, an enlightened mind, but it is a different journey. We have to come to the point

where we can experience enlightenment of consciousness. If it takes sixty years to condition ourselves, it will take sixty years to decondition ourselves, that makes one hundred and twenty years. Then we start to again recondition ourselves to a different wavelength. We need a lifespan of approximately two hundred years to do what we want to do, but there is a saving grace. If we apply ourselves diligently and systematically, evolution can be instantaneous. It can happen instantly.

Role of buddhi

Human beings have the ability to dissect different experiences. We experience jealousy and compassion, love and hatred, selfishness and selflessness, heat and cold, day and night. We can identify each and every experience. Although these experiences are coming from the same source, the mind, they are identified as different. However, animals cannot identify experiences as human beings do, although the experiences are the same, heat and cold, hunger and satisfaction, pain and comfort. An animal is not able to extract or separate one experience from the collection that it is receiving, whereas we can.

This is the growth of consciousness. Human beings can identify and differentiate things, the lower stages of life cannot. The expression of consciousness and life is different for a cockroach, an ant, a bacteria or an amoeba. If we give someone a bundle of items and tell them to stack the items separately. The person will open the bundle and start stacking cloth, jewellery, cosmetics, and so on, in separate piles because they know the difference between the items. Intellect, *buddhi*, is active. If we told an elephant, donkey or dog to separate the same items, they would not be able to identify one piece from another, because their consciousness, their mind is not awakened. Buddhi, intellect, the process of knowing, is not active. Intellect can free us from suffering and also bind us in pain. As long as our perceptions are external and we are seeking external satisfaction, the mind binds itself more and more in the material dimension, which creates blockage in

the growth and development of the spiritual nature. The more materialistic we become, the further away we go from our spiritual nature.

The spiritual nature has been defined as having balance between what we have and what we don't have. If we don't have a car and we are craving one, it becomes our obsession and ambition to acquire one. All our energies and thinking are directed to acquiring that car. We put ourselves into it head, heart and soul. In this drive, the mind becomes more and more associated and identified with material objects and the senses, which distract it from the internal experience.

Body and senses

Yogis have identified body and senses, mind and intellect, spirit and transcendental nature. These six items flow in sequence. Our consciousness, our mind perceives the body through the senses. Not everything can be seen, many things are felt, many things are experienced. We don't see sound, we experience sound. We see a statue, a rock, a form, so there is a difference between experiencing and seeing. Seeing and experiencing are the two faculties that control and govern our life.

Many people don't believe in what they can't see. Once I was travelling with Sri Swamiji through the Himalayan region. The taxi driver said he did not believe what sannyasins preached. "Sannyasins speak of God, but nobody can see God. How can you know something which you can't see?" Sri Swamiji said, "You are right. Did you go to school?" The taxi driver said, "Yes, up to college." Sri Swamiji then asked him if he had heard of radio waves and the taxi driver said yes, but when he was asked if he could see radio waves, he said no. Sri Swamiji then said, "Why don't you deny the existence of a radio if you can't see the radio waves." The taxi driver said, "Yes, but I can listen to them on a radio." Sri Swamiji said, "Yes, just as you have to fine-tune the radio to pick up the appropriate waves, you have to fine-tune the brain to receive the higher waves which you can realize as God, or as the transcendental nature, or as the cosmic nature, or by any

other name.” The man became absolutely silent. He said, “I have never heard this kind of explanation before.” So I said to him, “You have never come across a sannyasin either. What you have heard is coming from a sannyasin who has gone through that process.”

In our life, our perception and experiences extend only to the senses and not beyond. The five senses are our guide. Every bit of information that we receive is through these five organs of perception, *jnanendriyas*. Beyond that, whatever exists is considered to be beyond human reach, but nothing is beyond human reach. Everything comes from this body, it is the foundation. The body is visible. Inside the body are the senses. These two are responsible for life on this planet. The body and senses are one set.

Brain and mind

Another set is the brain, mind and the four expressions of the mind. The mind is inside the brain. Just as strength is inherent in muscle, just as luminosity is inherent in fire, similarly, the mind is an inherent expression, faculty and quality of the brain. The mind is further classified and divided into *manas*, the reflective mind, *buddhi*, the knowing mind, *chitta*, the remembering mind, the experiencing mind where the memories are stored, and *ahamkara*, the self-identified mind. The mind which identifies itself as an independent individual entity is ego, ahamkara. The brain, mind and the four expressions of the mind are another set.

Balanced emotions

The third set is the emotions, sentiments. Purity of emotion leads to realization of the transcendental nature. Through emotion we access our spirit. This idea has been clearly defined in the twelfth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, which is on bhakti yoga. Bhakti yoga has been called the yoga of devotion, but from Sri Krishna’s perspective, bhakti yoga is balance, not devotion, not adoration, not ritual, not worship. Bhakti is finding perfect balance of emotion. In describing the components of a bhakta (12:18–19), he says that a real

bhakta is equipoised and not affected by the opposites of pain and pleasure, suffering and contentment.

*Samah shatrau cha mitre cha tathaa maanaapamaanayoh;
Sheetoshnasukhadukheshu samah sangavivarjitah.
Tulyanindaastutirmaanee santushto yena kenachit;
Aniketah sthiramatir bhaktimaan me priyo narah.*

One who sees enemy and friend with equal vision, who is balanced in the opposites, heat and cold, pleasure and pain, one to whom abuse and respect are equal, who is silent, content with anything, one who has developed a unified vision and sees every individual as one, not different, that type of bhakta is dear to me.

People translate the word bhakta as devotee, but in this context *bhakta* means a person who has attained inner realization, inner union.

In chapter 12, verses 12 to 20, every description given indicates that one has to attain emotional balance. Once emotional balance is attained, realization comes, because there is nothing pulling you or binding you anywhere anymore. That realization is instantaneous. It is like shining a torchlight in an unexplored cave which has been in darkness for thousands of years. In one second the darkness of centuries will disappear and the cave will be illuminated. Similarly, when balance of emotions is attained, the darkness of the soul is lifted instantaneously and the light of the transcendental nature manifests and illuminates the life process. So the human journey is using the body and mind to come to this fine balance. That is the process that has been advocated by the rishis, visionaries and seers of the past.

Yoga is becoming the drashta

Yoga has to be seen from a holistic point of view, not just as hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga or kundalini yoga, but as a process which can deepen our perception and help us to separate our own experiences, so that we are able to realize ourselves. Sri Swamiji says that we don't realize ourselves.

We realize the existence of our pleasures and pains, our envy, greed, hatred, jealousy and competitiveness, and the desire for compassion, love, affection, sympathy and support. Beyond that we are not able to realize our own nature. This is the statement of the *Yoga Sutras* (1:3): *Tada drashtuh svaroope avasthanam* – then the seer becomes established in his own nature. We become the witness, the *drashta*, and are not dragged into the experience of fear, insecurity, hatred or animosity, nor to the other side of becoming over-compassionate, over-loving or over-kind. When we are able to become a witness to whatever is happening, that *drashta* nature will eventually take us out of the gravity of these mental and sensorial experiences.

Yogic awareness has to be applied every moment of our life. One hour of yoga practice and twenty-three hours of nonsensical activity is not going to help anybody. We try to release stress and anxiety in one hour of yoga practice, which is not systematic because half of the time goes into bodywork and half in chatting with the teacher in the guise of a consultation. For many years now I have been pushing people to observe and analyze what they have gained so far. Not a little bit of this and a little bit of that. There has to be a definite attainment in the mental state, the physical state and the emotional state. Our practices, lifestyle and involvement with yoga should lead us to an understanding of what we have left behind and what we have gained, how far we have walked along the path.

Dealing with the vrittis

We are always fighting with ourselves, feeling guilty, feeling stressed out, feeling the different sentiments that come up due to this confrontation and non-acceptance of ourselves. This is what Sage Patanjali has said when he defined yoga as (1:2): *chitta vritti nirodha* – the cessation of the peaks in the mind. When the peaks, the spikes of the mind are more rounded, that is *chitta vritti nirodha*. The spikes of the mind do not become a flat line, that is non-existent, so the ultimate aim is not to come to a flat line. We remove the spike, make

it more gentle, more curved. That is the concept of chitta vritti nirodha. The outcome is more balance, fewer ups and downs, more harmony and peace. We stay within the range of the curves.

Imagine the range is a scale of one to ten, this is the source of our balance, contentment and happiness while undergoing everything in life, while doing the karmas and actions. That component is karma yoga. Karma here is associated with wisdom. When karma associates with wisdom and wisdom guides the actions, that is karma yoga. When karma is reactive and responsive and there is no wisdom, just brashness and rashness, that is the binding karma. Anything beyond the range of one to ten are the spikes that cause frustrations, anxieties and problems. When we come within the range of one to ten, there we cultivate the drashta component, the witnessing component, and we begin to realize our real nature.

Until now we have not realized our real nature. We have realized anger, anxiety, frustration, depression, needs and desires, but not the tranquillity, peace, silence and oneness of our nature. We have to live with the mind, so why not make it a friend? Why confront it and make it an enemy? If there is guilt, fear and insecurity, it is self-created, self-generated and self-experienced. We might be angry about something, but who is suffering? The anger is burning us inside, not the other person.

We create our own niche of comfort and discomfort, happiness and suffering. That is our corner. The normal tendency is to withdraw, to protect ourselves, to go into our corner. However, at that time the vrittis become powerful and more intense for there is no outlet. As they become deeper and stronger, more pain and suffering is created. When there is an outlet for the vritti to manifest, the air clears completely. This example indicates a state of perception, involvement of the mind with an idea, a thought pattern, an attitude, which are the vrittis. What is a vritti? Vrittis are not different to thoughts, not different to feelings, not different to the normal mental behaviour. Vrittis are the normal mental behaviours,

with spikes. Once the spikes are rounded off through sadhana, through meditation, through lifestyle management, we become balanced, in the range of one to ten. We are all trying to discover that balance. That is actually what yoga is all about.

From buddhi to bhava

People come to yoga for different reasons, but ultimately the practices will guide the individual towards balance. Enjoyment happens when we are contented, happy and at peace. That is the direction of sadhana. One of the strongest sadhanas to lead us in this direction is mantra and music because they affect the emotions and sentiments, not the intellect. Intellect can cause confusion, comparison, assessment, analysis, create questions and create answers, but mantras open the energy of the heart and explode the energy of the emotions and bring out that power. There is power in everything. There is inherent strength in the body, but it manifests only when we need to use it, whether it is to pick up a small stone or a large rock.

Energy is also inherent in emotions as well as in the mind. Mental energy is known as buddhi, emotional energy is known as *bhava*. As long as we are stuck to buddhi, there is no salvation. When we come to bhava, the air clears immediately. A classic example of this situation is two people who are madly in love and living together. In the course of time, there is strife and one incident destroys their connection and relationship completely. What happened to that feeling of love which was overpowered by greed, jealousy or anger? If we reconnect with love, jealousy, greed and anger will have no place.

Maintaining emotional balance, the bhava balance, leads to enlightenment, or evolution of consciousness. Enlightenment is evolution of consciousness. Mantra becomes the process, the tool by which the energy of bhava is elevated. Right now our bhava energy is not elevated. We have good IQs but very disturbed EQs. All our EQs are at different levels and are distorted and depressed, because we are craving and searching for something. Bhava becomes the energy, the force,

for ultimate self-awareness and self-realization. The mind is transcended, or left behind.

So we have to actually shift from the head space, buddhi, to the heart space, bhava. The heart space is the connecting force. It does not see any division or difference in anything or anyone. The people who have been inspirers in the course of the human journey have awakened their bhava, their heart space. Intellectuals have been appreciated, they have written good things, but inspirers are those who have shown the way to follow the path of the heart. That is an indication that if we follow the path of the heart, we can change ourselves and help other people come out of their limitations and to grow.

Experiencing Spiritual Life

Spiritual life needs to be understood in practical terms. We read theories and philosophies by different authors, in different scriptures and modern-day literatures. Despite that, we still tend to think of spiritual life as religious, when in reality spiritual life is totally different to religious life, devotional life or contemplative life.

What is the meaning of spiritual life? Tantra, Samkhya, Vedanta and Yoga are the four major systems of thought, discipline, lifestyle and philosophy which have given a definite direction to the development of human life. They speak of spiritual life as an aspect of our experience in this life, where we come in touch with the creative and positive qualities inherent within us.

From *tamas* to *sattwa*

In simple terms, normal life is tamasic and spiritual life is sattvic. The normal life that we live is tamasic, meaning that we are all extroverts, connected with the senses and the world. That is the simplest meaning of the word *tamas*, a state of existence, a state of life, a state of being where we identify not with our inner nature but with the outer nature. The whole world is in this tamasic state of mind. We identify with our senses and sensory needs, and with our mind and mental ambitions. We identify with our environment and create a relationship based on mutual expectation. Our actions and behaviours are directed and geared towards personal

contentment, satisfaction and fulfilment. The mental nature that manifests in this process is given the name tamasic, it is the material, external, manifest and conditioned.

The association that an individual has with the world evokes different responses of energy and consciousness, depending on the actual behaviour of the mind. Love is a response of the mind to a certain situation. Hatred and jealousy are responses of the mind to a certain event or person, an external connection. Compassion is a response of the mind. These different associations create a mental response. This mental response combines the response of consciousness and the response of energy. The mind is the interactive consciousness and the self is the passive consciousness.

When the mind evokes a response, we are taken by that force. We do not witness our jealousy, we experience it and it manifests in our behaviour, attitudes, perceptions and responses all the time. It is the same with love, compassion, sensitivity, clarity or confusion. Our identification with these different responses represents the vritti of the mind. Anger is a vritti, depression is a vritti, anxiety is a vritti, stress is a vritti, lethargy is a vritti. They are the peaks, the spikes, in the mental waves. This is considered to be tamasic, the normal existence.

Yogis have always believed that there is something beyond the normal. There is a cycle in nature, night follows day, day follows night. Similarly, consciousness has a cycle, energy has a cycle, and they also follow that system. If consciousness is extroverted and the experiences are external, there will be something internal as well. We have an internal experience in sleep. During the day we are active, involved, connected with the world. We are plugged into the world. At night when we disconnect, we are not aware of the world around us, we are sleeping. We may be dreaming, we may be resting, we may be going through other subtle experiences of which we are not conscious, but we are not conscious to connect with the world at that time. It is a different state of mind. In the same manner, sattwa is a different state of mind in which the spikes

of the mind do not control and guide our actions, behaviours, attitudes, relationships, involvement and participation. Sattwa is greater balance in the manifestation and expression of these mental states. Cultivating the positive and creative is the sadhana of sattwa. It is the sadhana of spiritual life.

Sadhana of spiritual life

The sadhana of spiritual life is not meditation and getting lost in abstract thinking or ideas. The sadhana of spiritual life is not trying to evoke a mental experience based on certain ideas which you are creating or somebody is creating for you. The sadhana of spiritual life does not mean that you sit down and start flying with angels and seeing the divine spark everywhere.

Three points have to be understood. One is interaction, one is experience and one is realization. They are totally different to each other. Interaction leads to experience, and experience lead to realization, but they are three different things. You experience your thoughts; you don't see them, feel them or touch them. You experience your emotions; you don't see them, feel them, touch them or grasp them. It is non-physical. You experience it.

Experience happens at the level of the mind, interaction happens at the level of senses and realization happens at the level of spirit. You realize that 'I exist'. You know that you exist in this body. That is a realization, not an experience. That realization comes due to a collection of experiences which lead you to understand that 'I am here'. In spiritual life, when you meditate on something abstract and try to become that, you are trying to bypass the actual behaviour of the mind and to establish yourself in some imaginative, fantasy state. At present, even if you wished to see God or Shiva or Brahma or Jehovah or anybody, what you would imagine or experience would be your creation, because you want it. If they come without you wanting them, that is not your creation, that is grace. If they appear before you without you even thinking about it, but because you have the strength to attract them to you, then that is grace.

However, if you want to realize them now in your meditation, in which you try to eliminate twenty-three hours of nonsense in one hour, you know how difficult it is. It is like collecting water in a tank for twenty-three hours and opening the outlet for one hour. Only one hour of water will flow out. The next day you add a further twenty-three to the remaining twenty-two, and again release one hour of water. The accumulation is more than you have released.

Therefore, yoga says to cultivate awareness. Awareness becomes the key to move from *tamas* to *sattwa*. Awareness becomes the path that you walk to move from the *tamasic* state of interacting with life to the *sattwic* state, which is positive, optimistic, creative and harmonious. Being established in the *sattwic* state is the definition of spiritual life. Spiritual life means you establish yourself in a *sattwic* state and experience inner balance, purity, fulfilment and creativity. Cultivate positive qualities. Try to change your weaknesses into strengths. Know yourself and become the master of yourself. Socrates said, “Know thyself.” ‘Know thyself’ is the yogic process. Not knowing ‘I exist’, but how you can become better.

Excel in life

The aim of life is not God-realization, it is the acquisition of excellence in life. That is the *sankalpa* I have taken. I don’t care whether I see God or not. That is not my intention, not the ambition or aspiration of my life. If it happens, it will happen because it is bound to happen. My direction in life is the attainment of excellence in everything. In yoga try to excel in every moment, in relationships, in speech, thought and behaviour. Excel in frustration, in love, in passion. Excel in meditation. If you have this attitude, you will find that you live a spiritual life.

The defeatist tendency comes in material life. “Defeat the defeatist tendency within you” were Swami Sivananda’s words to the former president of India, Dr A.P.J Abdul Kalam. When Dr Kalam was a young man, he wanted to become a fighter pilot but failed the exam. Feeling dejected, he came to Rishikesh on his way home. He was sitting by the river Ganga,

contemplating his future, when Swami Sivananda came walking along. He stopped and asked the young man what he was doing there. Dr Kalam explained what had happened, and said he felt without a purpose in life. Swami Sivananda said, “You have failed because you are not destined to excel in those areas. Your destiny is to do something else, so don’t be dejected. Defeat the defeatist tendency in your mind, and again participate in the world wholeheartedly.” Fifty years later, Dr Kalam still says, “This sentence has inspired me and continues to inspire me.”

This is the essence of spiritual life. In material existence, in outer connections, we are defeated by situations, or we feel defeated. Defeat indicates the tamasic state. If we can defeat that tendency, then we are in a sattvic state and we are spiritual, because that is one of the greatest instincts to be overcome. Therefore, spiritual life is not a religious or a devotional life, not a life of contemplation, not a life of thinking airy-fairy things. It is a pragmatic life in which we are aware of ourselves and what we wish to become in the course of time. The movement from *tamas* to *sattwa* is spiritual life.

Mantra – key to the door of spiritual life

The foundation of spiritual life is mantra, not asana, pranayama, meditation or any other activity. Mantra is the key to open the door of spiritual life. From the yogic perspective, mantra is the first and last initiation; there is nothing more beyond it. Mantra is the only process by which one can come in touch with one’s own inner nature. Sri Swamiji was told by his guru to practise five malas of his mantra. He has practised it diligently every day, five malas in the morning, five malas at night. The most beautiful thing he said was, “I water this plant with mantras every morning and every evening.” Human life is the plant, and we water this plant with mantra. That is the first and the last sadhana of yoga.

If you look at the yogic sequences, after going through hatha yoga and raja yoga, ultimately you have to establish yourself in bhakti yoga. Mantra is the basis of bhakti yoga. Through hatha yoga you manage your body, through raja yoga

you manage your mind, through jnana yoga you manage your intellect, through karma yoga you manage your behaviour and through bhakti yoga you manage your emotions. Through kundalini yoga you manage your psychic nature, through kriya yoga you manage your inner nature. Each yoga has a purpose. Mantra yoga, which is a science in itself, stands as a process where you come in contact with your inner self.

There are different systems of mantra yoga: japa, anushthana, sadhanas, havans, pooja; some are ritualistic, some are meditative. These systems of mantra create an inner environment which is conducive to the development of the individual. They also help create an outer environment where the natural energies become benevolent and assist the evolution and growth of the individual.

An example is doing havan with mantras. On Saturdays we do the Mahamrityunjaya mantra. It is not a religious act; it is repetition of the mantra and focusing the energy of the mantra into one element of nature. Nature and human beings are one and the same. The outer nature is composed of the five elements and this body is composed of the five elements. We can perceive earth, water, fire, air and ether outside and we can perceive the combination and permutation of these same five elements in our body. When we look at trees we see them as a separate life form, and when trees look at us they look at us with the eyes of a separate life form having the same five elements.

Try to look at yourself from the perspective of nature and you will realize what a funny person you are. Try to look at yourself from the perspective of a tree, an ant or an elephant – it's not possible.

The power of internal experiences

That kind of identification can be frightening too. Once I had an experience where the identification was so strong that I lost body consciousness completely. I was a passenger in a car in Tasmania, going to Queenstown in 1976. At one point I saw a willow tree, and although the car passed it, my mind remained behind. For a moment, which felt like hours, I lost body awareness and I became the tree. I could feel the leaves,

the wind, the twigs, the branches, the muck on my leaves, the lapping of water on my roots. It was a frightening experience.

I realized that this kind of identification could take place with an object, a person, an idea or an image, and one would lose one's sanity. There are god-intoxicated people who are labelled as crazy, eccentric, but they live in a different dimension altogether and are disconnected from the world. Quite a few are in mental hospitals. Our understanding of the mind is superficial and we treat it as a disease. We are unable to manage such people and there is always a negative response due to lack of understanding. Some are crazy in reality, but some have experienced, seen and felt something that they are unable to define. When that experience happened, I said to myself, "Go back to pratyahara, do ajapa, do antar mouna, do chidakasha dharana, but don't go into the stage of dhyana until you are ready."

Just as we identify with the world and attach ourselves, there is also an internal identification with the inner self. Just as we feel threatened and insecure when something external is shaking our connection, there is also insecurity when something happens internally and it changes our life, our mind and our attitude. The experience of being the tree shook me to the very foundation, it was a complete loss of human identity. Guru's grace brought me back to my body, but it was a moment when I could have gone because the mind was definitely not in the body. My body was travelling in the car going further and further away and my mind was stuck in that experience.

We should not try to experience or attain something without prior preparation, because internal experience is totally opposite to outer experience. When we are facing the world, our back is behind, but if I turn around, my back will be to the world, so I disconnect from the world. I can't have my feet in two boats unless I want to go in for a swim. How does one swim in the ocean when one doesn't know how to swim? Therefore, the journey from the tamasic state to the sattwic state should be our aspiration and aim in order to experience the fulfilment of our spiritual nature.

Mantra sadhana

Mantra is the basis of this journey. Mantra has to be practised in different forms. The three mantras, Mahamrityunjaya mantra, Gayatri mantra and the Durga mantras, should be chanted early in the morning as soon as you open your eyes in bed. You can whisper them or say them mentally so that you don't disturb your partner, but say them in bed while you are still in a semi-sleep state, the subconscious state. When you are not plugged in totally to the world and are in a semi-conscious state, the mantra becomes the sankalpa to form the mind for the day. Gradually that habit is built up over time. After a couple of months it becomes as important as having a coffee. Just as coffee becomes the need of the body to wake up, mantra becomes the need of the mind to maintain its sanity for the time it is connected to the world.

The other form of mantra, consciously guiding the mind to detach from outer experience and connect with inner experience, is mantra meditation with mala, which should be done at night. Do your mantra with your mala the prescribed number of times, last thing before going to bed. When Sri Swamiji gave me my mantra, he told me to practise two malas. Until today I have not been able to do it. If I can remain focused for half a mala or one mala, that is my achievement.

If you practise mantra, you know how difficult it is to maintain alertness. After the fourth mantra the mind is away and everything becomes automatic. After a few minutes you realize and you come back to where you are. I come back to zero and start again. In one session I come back many times, so I am never able to complete the two malas, but that is what I am trying to do. If I can be totally alert for two malas, then I have attained something, but if my alertness lasts for only ten beads, then I have to work hard at it. Therefore, I don't carry on from where my awareness returned, I go back to one and start again. Mantra meditation at night is important, in the words of Sri Swamiji, "to water this plant every morning and every night." Mantra is an important component for cultivating the sattwic state or spiritual life.

Balancing Spiritual and Material Life

Today we move from spiritual life awareness to material life awareness, from quality life inside to quantity life outside. When our ancestors first lived on this planet, they did not have a religion, but they had a deep insight into nature, the connection that an individual has with nature and the connection that the individual and nature have with the universe. With this deep insight, in the course of time, four ideas took concrete form, Tantra, Vedanta, Samkhya and Yoga. They were not only ideas, but also became something to live for and to experiment with in life. In this process of experimentation those people who went deep into it discovered that the individual acquired a different quality of life and perception. Gradually, these people became the *rishis*, the visionaries, the seers, the saints. They not only taught a philosophy, they lived it.

Darshan – direct perception of the unmanifest and manifest

In English, the word philosophy means love of knowledge. However, we identify Tantra, Samkhya, Vedanta and Yoga by the word darshan, which in English has been translated as philosophy. However, darshan means being able to realize, understand, acquire deep and definite contact with something. For example, when people hear my name and have not met me, they will imagine me to be something, tall or fat or short or pink or blue or white or black or green or orange, and create a mental image, but when they see me,

the direct cognition and perception clears away the previous preconceived notions. That direct cognition is known as *darshan*. In the absence of direct cognition, it is speculation, known as philosophy.

Darshan is a process which allows you to have direct perception, direct cognition. Of what? The holistic you. Who is the holistic you? The visible you and the invisible you. Who is the visible you? Your body and your senses. Who is the invisible you? Your mind, feelings, emotions and thoughts. These are the two dimensions that come together in life, the perceptible, the visible, the cognizable. Anything that is cognizable, that is perceivable by the senses and identified as an object is physical and manifest. Everything that is perceivable, not by the senses but by the mind, as an experience, is defined as internal.

If we look at fire, two things are happening. We are feeling the heat and we are seeing the flames. Who is feeling the flames and the heat? Who is seeing the flames? The senses are seeing the flames. Who is experiencing the heat? Heat is not something we can see. We are experiencing the heat. The mind is experiencing the heat. We are composed of these two areas of existence, visible and invisible, *drishta* and *adrishta*. *Drishta* means seen, *adrishta* means unseen. This is the holistic us. The seen and the unseen are connected with nature and with the cosmos by pranic strings, energy strings. Even the Earth is connected to the cosmos through lay lines, which are the nerves of the planet through which energy currents move, just as prana moves in our bodies through nadis. Everything manifest is connected to the unmanifest qualities of the universe as well, but it is not perceived.

Sri Swamiji gives this example. When uranium is mined, it is only a mineral, but that mineral contains the potency to eventually become nuclear energy. The mineral is taken to the lab, where it is put through a process of fission or fusion, and we are able to separate the inherent energy of that matter and use it. In its natural form that potent energy is only a mineral. We can keep a lump of uranium and not use that energy, or we can take it to the lab and use it. In the same manner, just

as a large force is contained in matter, the cosmic essences and qualities flow through the seen and unseen body. People have tried to understand the effect of the cosmos on human beings. Astrology has arisen as a result of that enquiry, as an understanding of the influence of the planets, stars, sun and moon on a human life. The cosmic connection is one level of understanding, but there are other levels, subtle levels. Everything that is up there is reflected here. There is no difference.

We can speak of the unified field theory at the universal level and we can see the unified field theory as an existing reality in our body, mind, structure and character. If a mosquito bites our toe, where do we feel the pain? Who feels the pain? Our toe or our head? This body is a classic representation of the unified field theory. The same thing happens on a universal scale, a cosmic scale. If a planet were to explode, it would be like a cell exploding in our body and gradually spreading disease through the body. If a planet exploded, the universe would be affected.

Creation and dissolution

Tantra says that each individual is a replica of the universe. The same essence that is cosmic and universal is contained in our body, and that has to be realized. But how do we understand transcendental concepts with a non-transcendental mind? Words have to be found to create an image or idea of transcendental concepts. This transcendental nature, which was universal and is universal, the tantrics named *tantra*, the combination of consciousness and energy. Tantrics have an interesting theory of creation. In fact, it is no longer a theory, because science today is reaching a point of creating similar thoughts and discovering similar events that have happened in past history.

The tantric Shaivite tradition, for example, says that the world was destroyed and regenerated twenty-seven times. We are in the twenty-seventh cycle of life. Each cycle is comprised of a time divided into four yugas: Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dwapara Yuga and Kali Yuga. At the end of each

cycle, dissolution takes place. After some time of peace and quiet, creation starts again. This has happened twenty-seven times. Scientists now say that the Big Bang has happened approximately twenty times, using their present instruments of analysis. If they are able to go further back, they may discover that it has happened twenty-seven times. What does this indicate? That each time a new creation has come forth after dissolution. It is not dissolution of one planet or solar system or star, it is universal dissolution.

How does it happen? If you put one drop of ink in a jar of water, when it falls in the water it is a solid blob, but as time passes the ink mixes with the rest of the water and simply dissolves. Creation started with one bang, Satya Yuga, and from that time it has been spreading, and it will spread so thinly that it will dissolve. When you hear a bang, the sound is loud, but after some time the intensity of the sound decreases until it becomes inaudible. Similarly, creation will spread out so much that it will simply dissolve into nothing, and that will be the end of one cycle. Then another bang will happen. This is the tantric theory of creation. In that state of stillness when everything is dissolved, who exists or what exists? It is a question which they have asked. When there is nothing, when everything has dissolved, nothing exists – what exists? That which exists becomes the source of another cycle.

The *Nasadiya Sukta* of the *Rigveda* is full of questions about the origin of the universe: who is not there, who was not there before, who is living, who was not living before, is that real, is that unreal, what do we believe in, what don't we believe in. The entire sukta consists of questions about what happens when nothing exists, before the beginning of the new cycle. We don't exist, our philosophies, thoughts, ideas and beliefs don't exist. God as we think and perceive it does not exist. What exists at that point in time? Much later the answer comes.

Shiva consciousness

In the nothingness of dark space there is only a glimmer, which begins to condense. That glimmer is called *Paramshiva*,

the transcendental Shiva. That is the first identification. That Shiva is benevolent. That glimmer contains the essence for regeneration of the entire creation. Just as a seed contains the potency to become an immense tree with leaves, flowers and fruits, in the same manner that glimmer which appeared in the darkness is the essence of creation. In that essence of creation everything that is auspicious, good and benevolent is retained, because creation is the outcome of that benevolent nature which needs to nurture, to grow, to develop. Paramshiva is not a masculine figure or power. Paramshiva contains both the Shakti and Shiva components inherent in it. Just as strength is inherent in the body, light in the sun, fire in wood and life in the body, Shakti and Shiva are integrated. There is no separation in the state of *param*, the transcendental quality.

Then this glimmer becomes light, bigger and bigger as more essences are attracted to it. The luminous orb becomes bigger and bigger and bigger. Then a split happens. Shiva separates from Shakti. That is the Big Bang. Shakti is liberated from Shiva to create, to become part of nature, to manifest as nature in the form of planets, stars and the nature that we see around.

Yogamaya

We live in the realm of Shakti. Shakti is identified as yogamaya. *Yoga* means attunement with reality, and *maya* means identification with the unreal. Yogamaya is the power which can lead to union or the power which can lead to separation. This is the dual role of energy, and we live in the ocean of energy. The entire creation is an ocean of yogamaya, the possibilities of potency that exist to unite us with our source or to separate us from our source. It depends which aspect becomes strong in our life. Magnets have two poles. If the poles are compatible, the two magnets will come together. That is yoga. If the poles are opposite, they will repel each other. That is maya. The two magnets will never join, no matter how hard we try, because maya is there. The magnet is a classic example of yogamaya. Yogamaya is the

energy responsible for our body, for everything that we live for. Consciousness is passive.

Drashta and karta, observer and doer

When you are totally engrossed in the sound of music, in the nada, at that time you are experiencing the sound and you are observing the sound. You are following each note, becoming one with the sound. That is the drashta or witnessing consciousness, but when you are thinking how superb the sound is while listening to it, you are no longer the drashta, because the sound is evoking a response and you are responding. Drashta is the witness; it does not respond, it observes.

In a family, one day it is the mother's duty to look after the small child. The father can sit back and be the drashta, while the mother is the karta. Next day it is the father's duty to look after the child. The mother can become the drashta, while the father becomes the karta. *Karta* means doer, *drashta* means seer. The passive consciousness which observes is the seer consciousness. The involved consciousness which is responding is the karta consciousness. In the course of time, this consciousness becomes the aspiration to find happiness, contentment and fulfilment. This is the drive that directs you towards spiritual discovery.

Balancing material and spiritual life

You can pursue material life, but in the back of your mind you will be dissatisfied. There will be the thought, "How can I be happy and more contented? I have everything, but still I am not fulfilled. What next?" The corporate world survives on this theory. Each individual thinks, "I have come to this point, what's next?" Each student thinks, "The teacher has told me this, now what's next?" We all try to rush into what's next? Look at yourself. You don't want to perfect pratyahara; you want to jump to dhyana straight away. You don't want to spend time practising pawanmuktasana; you want to do stretches because that seems more important than preparation. 'What's next?' is the natural attitude or behaviour in life. You have

done it and as a result you have failed in the basics. It is like trying to row your boat without unhitching it first.

Everybody wants the best of both worlds, but that level of understanding must develop too. How can you keep both in sight? You are looking out into the world. The guru is internal, sitting behind you. If you want to identify with the spiritual world, you need to turn around, but when you turn around, your back is to the world and disconnection has taken place. People will think, “What kind of a person is this who has shunned the world?” So what do you need to do? Look there, turn around, look there, and walk down the middle, looking to both sides, but not going to one side or the other. You are aware of both sides and can make an appropriate decision about where you need to be at the right moment.

You should have the ability to perceive both your involvement in the tamasic, worldly, material dimension, and your aspiration to know the spiritual dimension, knowing fully well, that you can only aspire to know the spiritual. If you want to become spiritual, then hard decisions have to be made, but if you want to aspire to develop spiritual awareness, that is walking the middle path. Buddha took the hard decision, but advocated the middle path for his followers. Swami Sivananda took the hard decision, complete cut off. Swami Satyananda took the hard decision, complete cut off. No family, no friends, no associations, no relationships, but they advocated the middle path for normal people. If you want to use both, you have to follow the middle path. This is the teaching given by most people who have made the hard decision, because they have understood that the switch is not possible, the complete 180 degree turn is not possible. Therefore, they speak of lifestyle.

Yogic lifestyle

While we are in the world of maya, let our lifestyle be yoga – yogamaya. How can we make our lifestyle a yogic lifestyle? Once upon a time I was a yoga teacher, teaching classes, asana, pranayama, yoga nidra, meditation, for one and a half hours, three times a day, six times a week, a hundred times a

year. When I reflect on those days now, at that time I did have the satisfaction that I was teaching something important and useful for people. Today, will I teach a yoga class or lifestyle? My choice will be lifestyle. For yoga practice to gel in life, it has to become a lifestyle, part of the daily routine. It can't be one hour of practice every morning and then forget about it for the remaining twenty-three hours. It can't be one or two sessions per week with a yoga teacher in a yoga centre. Gradually, all yoga teachers will have to teach their students how to integrate the yogic teachings in their life and daily routine.

Monday to Friday sadhana

Yogic capsules are the sequence and process of yoga to be incorporated into the day-to-day routine. Chant the three mantras in the morning after waking up while you are still in bed half asleep. When you are ready, practise at least five asanas for general maintenance of the body and physical wellbeing. It will take a maximum of twenty minutes, even with shavasana thrown in. The five practices are *tadasana*, *tiryak tadasana*, *kati chakrasana*, *surya namaskara* and one inverted asana, if you are able, either the shoulderstand or headstand. You don't need to do anything more than that as a routine. They are simple enough to be practised by everybody. Then practise two pranayamas. One is *bhramari*, the humming bee, to balance yourself internally. The second is *nadi shodhana pranayama*, alternate nostril breathing, with awareness on an equal ratio of inhalation and exhalation. If it is seven seconds breathing in it should be seven seconds breathing out. If it is ten seconds breathing in, it should be ten seconds breathing out.

In the evening, when you come home from work, go to your bedroom and do a short yoga nidra and release the anxiety, stress and tiredness that you have accumulated in the work environment. It need not be the complete yoga nidra; it can also be the power nap, the short yoga nidra, rotation of awareness through the different parts of the body and relaxing each part. Then, at night, when you are ready for bed, practise two malas of mantra meditation.

This is the day's yoga. Do it five days a week – Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and stop there.

Saturday sadhana

On Saturday it is not necessary to practise the asanas, pranayama and yoga nidra. On Saturday and Sunday do the three mantras in the morning and the evening mantra meditation. During the day practise one yama or niyama of your choice; for example, be truthful, *satya*, for one day in everything that you do. Just pick one and try to live it for a day.

Saturday is the day for Mahamrityunjaya havan. If you can do it at home with a small fire, do so. Just add a pinch, a leaf of samagri; you don't have to throw in a handful. You can light the fire in a small cup, on a steel plate. If you don't have the herbs, put one grain of rice on the fire with every *Swaha*. Do this havan every Saturday.

Practise at least one hatha yoga shatkarma every Saturday, either neti or kunjla or laghoo, depending on your need. The Saturday program is one shatkarma, mantra havan and one yama or niyama.

Sunday sadhana – jnana yoga

Sunday is your day for jnana yoga and bhakti yoga. Jnana yoga does not begin with self-enquiry, not by asking, "Who am I?" First you have to discover who you are. It is like a car becoming sentient for a moment and questioning "Who am I? Am I the current flowing through me?" No, the car is not the current flowing through and giving motion to the car. A car is a combination of many different parts, mechanical, electrical, digital. A car should ask, "Do I know all my nuts and bolts?" That is the beginning of self-enquiry. Do you know all your nuts and bolts? Do you know all the parts that make you tick, that make you move? They are not the legs, hands, fingers, head, eyes or senses. They are your abilities. Do you know what they are?

The SWAN principle is the first practice of jnana yoga, the way to discover your own nature. What are my strengths, what are my weaknesses, understand that first. That is the

beginning of jnana yoga. Not ‘Who am I? I am the eternal spirit’; anyone can say that, but it means nothing. Realizing your abilities and strengths means something in the course of your life and existence. Thinking, ‘I am divine, and I can turn water into wine’ does not give any clarity and understanding of life. It is also not possible until you are able to turn your back to the world, to maya. Only then can you control the elements, otherwise forget it. Those who have turned their backs on maya are the siddhas. Christ was a siddha. He could control the elements. When Satan showed him all the riches of the world, Christ rejected everything, but you are not in a position to reject anything.

If we want a positive transformation, we have to start with jnana yoga, with self-discovery. We have to discover what our strengths are and use them positively, and we have to convert our weaknesses into positive qualities and strengths. That is the beginning of jnana yoga, which you have to do on Sunday. It is not going through an intellectual gymnastics program. For fifteen or twenty minutes or half an hour just sit down quietly and say to yourself, “Let me think about myself. What motivates me? Where do I fail? What holds me back? What inspires me? What are my strengths? What are my limitations? What are my needs and ambitions?” Doing this for fifteen minutes on Sunday is jnana yoga.

Sunday sadhana – bhakti yoga

Bhakti yoga should become a method by which you can attain purity of your inner nature and connect with nature around you. At Ganga Darshan I have started a tradition called tree pooja. Every evening the residents of the ashram go to a tree and light a small deepak, place a small flower and an incense stick there and pray for the welfare of everyone. *Sarve bhavantu sukhinaha, sarve santu niramaya* – may auspiciousness prevail everywhere, may happiness and contentment prevail everywhere.

When you do tree pooja, after this prayer, you walk away, let the light burn, the incense burn and the flower look beautiful. In summer, just put a flower and a cup of water,

nothing more. You don't have to light a deepak or incense. Don't change your tree, stick to one tree. That becomes your tree. Bhakti becomes part of yoga ecology. When you begin to be in that natural environment, you express a pure sentiment. When you are able to divert and direct your emotion from yourself to something more universal, the emotions become a power.

Emotion means energy in motion. Sri Swamiji has said many times that when energy in motion, emotion, connects with an object, it evokes a response. When you look at something nice or at something bad, an emotional response will be created. When you look at your child, you feel affection. When you look at your partner, you feel love. When you look at money, you feel greed. When you look at your adversary, you feel hatred, jealousy, competitiveness. When you look at a flower, there is appreciation. When you look at your elders, there is respect. Each contact evokes a response and emotion. When you think of God, there is awe, there is a response.

These energy responses are being directed outward, connecting us to the world around us. When the same energy response stops outside and the energy flow is diverted inside, then that becomes bhakti. It is the diversion of emotional energy towards discovery of the self which will lead you to the purity of feelings, sentiments and emotions. Bhakti leads to purification first, identification next and connection with a different attitude and mind, third. When you pray in front of the tree, let auspiciousness prevail, let contentment and happiness prevail. Let it radiate around the world like a beautiful fragrance. For that split moment come out of your selfish shell and connect with the selfless thought for a moment. That selfless thought generates a positive vibration. This simple act will give you a lot of peace, because that act has generated positive vibrations. It has connected you with the energy of the earth.

The most powerful element in existence is earth, not fire, not air, not water. It is the earth which nourishes and gives life at its own expense. We starve the earth of energy yet it never complains. Our selfish motivations make the earth

barren yet it never complains. It continues to give and to give and to give. It will continue to give till it has the ability to produce the last blade of grass. Then it will die. As long as earth is alive it will continue to produce. The best connection between the earth and the cosmos is in the trees. The tree has grown up from nothing. It has taken the essence of the earth and condensed it. It has taken the essence from the air and the cosmic environment and the energies and condensed it. That condensation of energy is given to you in the form of its fruit. All the nourishing energy of the earth and the cosmos, all the beauty that earth can give and the cosmos can make you aware of, you will find it in fruit and flowers. A tree is the representative of this power and nature of earth. It gives and gives.

During tree pooja, you are appreciating, respecting, acknowledging and realizing the power of giving of the earth and the cosmic, transcendental energy that sustains and nourishes the earth. Connecting with this energy will uplift you; it will make you pure, vibrant and enlightened. In the course of time, as you connect more with nature and the environment, you will discover that you will naturally begin to sing and chant mantras. Mantras create the right ambience, the right vibration, the right feeling. Mantras act as a bridge between the individual and the universal. Mantra is the connection. From one side of the river to the other, connecting the two shores, that is mantra.

This is the Sunday sadhana. It is the bhakti yoga that I believe in. I don't believe in the bhakti yoga of closed-minded religious methods. Bhakti should be able to enlarge our hearts, open the doors of our hearts, not close them. Instead of opening the door of our heart, we try to open the door of our intellect, and there we also we fail. We fail to understand what makes the other person act the way they do, whether it is your partner or a terrorist in New York. We don't understand our own people. Bhakti yoga is a way to enlarge the experience of the heart, and through the heart connect to the cosmic energy, the prana shakti which nourishes life at all levels.

The Yogic Process of Meditation

Easter is a time to define a clear goal and direction in life. Something has to die and something has to be reborn. It is said that Christ died for the sins of all. The biggest sin of all is negativity. The negativity of the human mind and nature can destroy a life completely and disconnect one from the beautiful experience life has to offer. Negativity denies the experience of beauty, the experience of grace and the experience of the peaceful and the tranquil. Our greatest sin is that we are negative. A greater sin is that we cannot handle that negativity. It has to be sacrificed; the limitations, restrictions and obstacles have to be removed so that a new free self can emerge from the ashes of the old.

From the yogic perspective this becomes possible through the process of meditation. People think meditation is something nice, a process by which one can experience peace, tranquillity and divinity in one attempt. But unfortunately it is not so. Meditation is a state of mind rather than a practice or process. It is a state of mind where we are in harmony and in tune with our own self.

Taming the four wild horses

Sri Swamiji used to tell the story of a king who had four wild, untamed horses. Nobody could ride them. The king made a pronouncement that anybody who could train the horses would receive a prize. Many people came for the gold, but they had no training. They tried to ride the horses on the

first day and the horses threw them off. Nobody was able to tame the horses, until one day a young man appeared and asked the king to let him try, but with one condition. He would take the horses away and return them after a year, fully trained and docile.

The king ultimately agreed, and the young man took the horses away. A year passed. By now the king thought that the horses had probably killed the trainer and run away. One day while he was walking on the terrace of his palace, he saw four beautiful horses in one line trotting up the path, and a young rider sitting on the first horse. He recognized the man and the four horses. The young man delivered the horses to the king, saying, "They are ready." The king asked, "Pray tell me, how did you train these horses? And what took you so long?"

The young man said, "Instead of trying to control the horses, I let them run free. When they ran, I ran with them. When they drank water, I made my coffee. When they grazed, I cooked my meals. I would follow the same routine as the horses. Gradually they accepted me. One day I put my hand on their backs. They did not like it, but gradually they got used to my touch, my smell. One day I put a blanket on the horse's back. They did not like it, but they got used to the blanket. One day I put on a saddle – they did not like, but they eventually got used to it. One day I put on the bridle. They did not like the bridle, but they got used to it. One day I sat on one of the horses. The horse was uncomfortable, but eventually it accepted me. In this way I gradually trained the horses to walk, to trot, to gallop, to run and to obey commands. It took time, but they are fully trained."

Dealing with the mind

This story defines how one has to deal with the mind. The four wild horses are the four aspects of the mind: manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara. They are all wild natures. There is nothing passive or harmonious about them. They are all wild and they have to be trained. When we meditate, the first attempt is to guide the mind to change its perception, its

awareness, from an outer perception to a broader and more encompassing perception. People generally struggle with the mind. A classic example is when we are trying to do our mala, and after a few mantras the mind goes away. We bring it back, then again it goes away, then again we bring it back. It is difficult to keep the mind focused on something for a long period of time. We struggle with it, we fight with it, and we don't succeed. Sri Swamiji has said the trick is to be friendly with yourself, accept your mind as it is. If it is negative, fine. If it is disturbed, fine. If it is peaceful, ok. However, when you accept the mind, remember that you are not behaving as the mind, rather you are behaving as a friend to the mind. As a friend you have to encourage the mind to become more and more alert and aware and to do your bidding. You don't do the bidding of the mind.

The same principle applies to *buddhi*, rationality. *Buddhi* is the source by which we gain knowledge and understanding. The knowledge or understanding we receive is filed away in the brain as an experience. It does not actualize in life. People spend years trying to do something and twenty years down the line they still can't do it properly. The normal tendency is to take things for granted, and then we don't excel in them. We don't apply the knowledge to create the best that we can do. If we look at our home, the place where we live, we will discover our mental system. If the table is cluttered, the mind is cluttered. If the table is clean, the mind is clean. If the wardrobe is cluttered, the mind is cluttered. There is no system we can create which brings us the feeling of purity, balance and harmony. When we are unable to create it externally, we are unable to create it internally. Outside is the reflection of what one feels inside, and inside is the reflection of what one sees outside.

Four stages of meditation

In meditation, this is a big problem. The normal tendency is to move very fast – what's next – rather than holding back and seeing everything around and then taking the next step. From the yogic perspective, the process of meditation is slow

and systematic. It is not instantaneous. Imagination, fantasy, believing in something can be instantaneous, but the process of making friends with the mind and buddhi and ahamkara is not instantaneous. Therefore, in yoga, meditation is classified as pratyahara, dharana and dhyana. Three stages are clearly defined. The fourth stage of meditation is the living meditation, samadhi, where we live a meditative state continuously all the time. In pratyahara, dharana and dhyana, meditation is a discipline. In samadhi, meditation is a lifestyle.

Pratyahara – relaxation, awareness, cleaning the mind

In pratyahara, the first stage is relaxing the mind. Relaxation is the first stage of meditation. Release all stresses and anxieties from the mind and make it tranquil and peaceful, relax it. Acknowledge those problems where the mind is stuck. Acknowledge those events or circumstances which influence the mind, like a fight, a loss, a gain, whatever it may be. Pacify the hyperactivity of the mind, relax it. Yoga nidra is the appropriate practice for the first stage of relaxation.

The second stage of meditation is to cultivate awareness. For this stage pratyahara practices like antar mouna and antar darshan are useful. You begin to observe the inner behaviour, the inner nature. In the practice of antar mouna, for example, we are observing the thoughts, stopping the thoughts, creating thoughts, directing thoughts. In this way, we become aware of the different areas of activity inside the mind. Thoughts, emotions, ambitions, insecurities, fears, instincts are all different areas of activity within the mind. Cultivate an awareness.

When you go to a new house for the first time, you look around and check everything, so you know where the flaws or defects are that need to be rectified. You know what you will do in the house once you become a resident. Just as you see your house for the first time, similarly, you have to see your mind, your buddhi, your chitta, and your ahamkara. Imagine this room is the dimension of manas. What is in the room? Where are the tables, the chairs, the bed? In your mind, what

are the different functions of manas which possess you from time to time and guide and direct your character, behaviour, attitudes and performance.

Apply the same method to buddhi. Convert knowledge into wisdom. Applied knowledge is wisdom. Knowing is only storing away the information, not applying it. When you read a book, you are storing information, not applying it, but when you begin to apply what you have read and understood, then that knowledge is converted and recognized as wisdom, applied knowledge.

Do the same with chitta. Bring out the memories and clear your mind of mental constipation. We are mentally constipated all the time, which is against the natural law. What you eat, you excrete. The body takes nourishment from food and then excretes the waste matter. If you are constipated, the energy emanations are not very positive. Our mind is constipated because we have stuffed so many things in it – impressions, memories of love, hate, desire, anger, frustration, greed, jealousy, hatred – that they become the building blocks of our character. So chitta has to be cleared of these impressions. In ahamkara, the negative traits of self-identity have to be cleared.

Therefore, after relaxation, awareness has to be cultivated as the second stage of meditation. The third stage of meditation is removing the debris, cleaning. Cleaning happens by acknowledging the block, wishing to move forward and releasing that impression, thought or idea from yourself. You are freeing yourself from the influence of the traits that have held you back and down. For cleaning, converting and transforming the limiting traits, the SWAN meditation is the most useful practice.

Dharana, concentration

After cleaning comes concentration. Concentration has to be cultivated. How? In dharana, concentration can be acquired only after the senses are stilled, and there are no distractions or diversions influencing the mind. From this perspective, dharana is a separate technique, after pratyahara and before

meditation. In pratyahara you have to still the senses, you have to know the four compartments of your mind. In dharana, when the senses are still, concentration begins.

Concentration begins with trataka. You need a symbol on which to focus. A candle flame is a simple image. The tradition says that the symbol can be any image that evokes a positive, respectful, loving, compassionate response. Use any symbol that evokes that sentiment. This particular concept is called *ishta*, the object of personal reverence or association, the quality you wish to see in yourself. The *ishta* is the symbol of that quality. *Ishta* also means something which emanates, which comes up from inside, which grows from inside. Concentration begins when there is a symbol. Initially, to introduce people to the concept of a symbol, trataka is used. Then, in the course of time, the symbol becomes part of the mantra. Mantra is another tool for deepening the meditative state, the dharana state, concentration.

In dharana, you have to struggle between sleep and being awake, because as the mind internalizes, sleep comes. The effort in dharana is to maintain the sleepless, subconscious awareness. If you sleep, it is no longer dharana, but if you can maintain and hold the awareness at the borderline, like you do in yoga nidra, you are awake but there is no body awareness, no outer awareness, no outer perception. Sleepless, subconscious awareness is the state which ultimately flowers in dharana. In this sleepless subconscious awareness, the mind gets in touch with its own nature. Before that, the mind is in touch with its sensorial nature, cerebral nature, interactive nature. Then in dharana, the mind-monkey closes its eyes. In pratyahara, it continues to look around and observe everything, but in dharana the mind-monkey closes its eyes. The moment the mind-monkey closes its eyes, concentration becomes acute, intense, sharp and deep, because there are no sensory distractions and the mind is focused on the symbol.

Dharana is the beginning of meditative awareness. There is fluctuation – you go in and you come out. Sometimes an ache in the lower back can bring you out of dharana,

Sometimes a mosquito bite on the neck, or an itch on the nose will bring you out from that state of deep, intense concentration and awareness. These are things that can easily be overcome for the mind is now your friend. With the mind as your friend, dharana intensifies.

Dhyana, meditative awareness

When the mind begins to support you, encourage you and help you, it becomes *dhyana*, meditative awareness. There you can sit down and go through a process of inner purification, cleansing of samskaras and karmas, and also cultivate a new vritti. From the yoga perspective one cannot live in the world without a vritti, so cultivate a positive vritti which inspires and connects you with others. Sri Swamiji uses the word *atmabhava*, the ability to see oneself in others, the ability to perceive one's own inner spirit as the spirit existing in each one. The prana that flows in my body is the same prana that flows in your body. The air that flows in my body is the same air that flows in your body. The spirit that gives me the experience of life is the same spirit giving you the experience of life, but now that life is qualitative, not quantitative. Material life is quantitative life and spiritual life is qualitative life. In material life you want quantity; in spiritual life you want quality.

In meditation, when we progress to dharana and deepen our concentration, this concentration unlocks the doors of our psychological traits, the samskaras and karmas. Opening the door happens in dharana. It is like digging a bore well into the ground and suddenly hitting water ninety feet underground. In dharana, suddenly you discover the samskaras and karmas that have been guiding your actions and you feel wonderfully happy, you realize that this is what you are.

Then in dhyana, the state of meditation, you cross the hurdle of samskara and karma, and you are at peace with your inner self. Once you are at peace with your inner self, the positive qualities of life will be nurtured and the destructive, limiting qualities of life will be set aside.

Samadhi, living the meditative state

When negativity is set aside and positivity is adopted, then in samadhi you live that meditative, qualitative awareness, even when you are walking around the garden, when you are working in the office or at home. No matter where you are you are able to maintain that awareness. That is the meaning of samadhi. Samadhi does not mean losing oneself in God-consciousness, as depicted by many people. That is not the definition of samadhi. *Dhi* represents knowing and *sam* represents balance, so the word *samadhi* means balanced knowing. Samadhi means living the meditative state in normal day-to-day activity. It is not losing body consciousness for six hours, and having people help you get up and move around. That is a deep meditative state, which is acknowledged in yoga. The uninitiated and the ignorant call it samadhi. Many yogis call it samadhi for they have not lived with their guru, and they don't have the training or understanding. If you read the traditional writings, scriptures and Sri Krishna's definition of samadhi in the *Bhagavad Gita*, it becomes clear that samadhi is active participation in life with cosmic consciousness manifesting through you in your body. That is the definition of samadhi.

We see that in the lives of saints. The body: heart, lungs, kidneys, stomach, legs, arms, eyes, ears, is that of a human being, but the quality of their nature is not the normal quality. There is something distinct and different about them. The difference is their attunement with the cosmic quality which manifested in the body as well as in nature, in the character, in the performance and ability. There are many people who are *siddhas*, adepts, people who have realized their nature and live according to their nature. That is the state of samadhi.

Christ was in a state of samadhi continuously. He did not need to sit and meditate. God would speak to Christ even when he was eating and drinking, talking and giving sermons. He did not need to close his eyes and say, "Don't talk to me. I am talking to my father." The connection and feeling with the universe is so intimate that that energy flows through you all the time. There is no distinction: my father and I are one.

At first Christ said, “My father and I are two,” but then he said, “My father and I are one.” When the awareness of dual existence was there, they were two. When the grace flowed through Christ, they were one.

People who have achieved that state have attained samadhi. Except for siddhas, no human being has attained samadhi. Everyone is practising up to meditation. It can be a lengthy six hour meditation. Buddhists do eight hour meditations, twelve hour meditations, sitting motionless. That is not samadhi, it is long meditation. Sometimes in meditation you can lose body perception for a couple of days, but still it is not samadhi. It is an advanced state of meditation. Meditation becomes samadhi only when the eyes are open, not before.

This process of meditation is considered to be the method by which we can balance both outer and inner experiences. In our own practice, if we can perfect only two things, relaxation and awareness, the rest of the journey will become very simple. How much peace we can maintain within ourselves is an indication of our growth in the meditative direction, the meditative path. People who have practised meditation for many years are still unable to maintain their peace because they did not try to think of meditation as a mental activity; rather they thought of it as identification with something different to the material. They were always looking beyond the walls, they could never realize what was within the walls. This is the state of meditators around the world today. That is the reality. We have to see what is on this side of the wall.

Pranayama

Meditation is further aided by a specific pranayama practice. The yogic scriptures say meditation should be preceded by the practice of pranayama: pranayama first, meditation next. Through pranayama we are able to balance the sensorial agitations and activities. The pranayama which the tradition has said should be perfected is nadi shodhana pranayama. Each mantra has a *matra*, a beat, which defines the length of the mantra. The Gayatri mantra has twenty-four matras, which is similar to twenty-four seconds in time. It is said that

one should have the ability to breathe in for at least one Gayatri mantra, which is twenty-four seconds, twenty-four matras, and breathe out for one Gayatri mantra, twenty-four seconds, twenty-four matras. We have the ability to breathe in for thirty seconds and to breathe out for thirty seconds, one breath a minute. When we come to the alpha state, meditation deepens. Pratyahara deepens, dharana is better, and it is easier to reach the meditative state.

Meditation sadhana

As a system of meditation what should one do regularly? Firstly, practise ten to fifteen minutes of yoga nidra, body rotation, relaxation. Secondly, practise ajapa japa, breath awareness between the navel and the throat, or the navel and the eyebrow centre, for five minutes. Thirdly comes symbol awareness. Practise concentration on the symbol, the flame or ishta. The ishta can be an image of Moses, Mohammed, Krishna, Devi, Durga, Guru, anything. It is a symbol of your choice that evokes a positive, respectful, peaceful response, not an anxious response, not an emotional response, not attachment, but a gentle and passive response, an uplifting response. It can be something from nature too; see a star, a flower, the sun in your mind, not outside. Focus on that. Use that concentration as the third stage of your meditation. Fourthly, practise mantra awareness.

These four stages constitute the practice of meditation. In each stage you can go deeper into the experience every week, or every month. When you do yoga nidra, you are relaxing the body. After a week, see if your mind is also relaxing along with the body or not. See if you are able to relieve the stresses easily and smoothly when you are relaxing or if there is a struggle, a fight. Deepen your area of perception. Deepen your perception and awareness of relaxation. Deepen the breath awareness. Sometimes it can be in the frontal passage, sometimes it can be in the spinal passage, sometimes it can be through the chakras, as in the system of ajapa japa, but it should not be changed frequently.

Take up one practice and do it for a minimum of one week regularly. If you are unable to do one week regularly, carry on with the practice for at least a month. If you are used to doing it twice or three times a week, do it for at least a month. If you do it daily, do it for at least a week. Then change it. The first week, or first month, is frontal awareness. The second week or the second month is spinal awareness. The third week or the third month is circular awareness. Each time you deepen your practice, you deepen your perception. You will see the difference in your meditation within a few months. It will not be a mechanical process. Rather, you will begin to see many things you had missed previously. They will be little, little realizations. Meditation ultimately becomes the vehicle by which we can experience the purity of our life and the effulgence of the human qualities. This is the system of yogic meditation.

Awakening Consciousness and Energy

How does yoga understand Christ consciousness, or Shiva consciousness? Apart from the ancient traditional belief systems, how does yoga perceive these aspects of consciousness? Space is the most important *tattwa* or element because it contains all the tattwas. Even when there is no creation, no matter and no manifestation of energy, what remains in that final state of dissolution prior to creation is nothing but space. Where does space begin or end? Nobody has been able to measure it, nobody knows how big space is. You can measure galaxies, you can discover other universes, but no matter how far you go, you will discover that they are all contained in space. Space is the container of all other elements.

In the vedic tradition, the seers have said that space is Brahman, the latent potency from which everything emerges. The latent potency from which everything emerges is called Brahman, not God. It doesn't have a form and doesn't have any other name. The word *Brahman* also means the evolving nature of space, the evolving nature of the universe, the evolving nature of consciousness, nature which is evolving continuously. That is the literal meaning of the word Brahman. It does not indicate an image or figure of God. The vedic traditions state that space is Brahman. In space, all the elements are contained in their latent form, waiting to emerge when the combinations and permutations are right and appropriate, which happens in the course of time. When

the other elements emerge from space as distinct, separate, elemental forces it is the beginning of creation.

The latent force or energy of every tattwa in its causal form is vibration. In the stillness and silence of space, when the latent elements reach their point of flowering, a vibration, *spandan*, is created. That vibration activates, or separates the different elements, the different tattwas, the different essences which are contained in one common container, space. As individual tattwas develop their own inherent natural potency, another metamorphosis takes place. They come alive with their individual qualities such as fire, heat, light, flame or water, and they develop their own nature. Whatever the manifestation may be – the fluidity, flow and current of water, the gentle breeze or fierce storm of air – they develop their own nature. Once the nature develops, that is Shakti, creation.

Cosmic consciousness and cosmic creatrix

Everything in latent form is Shiva and everything in manifest form is Shakti. This is the basic tantric concept. The essence contained in the seed form is called Shiva. Why? The word *shiva* means benevolent and auspicious, and the word *shakti* means energy, power or force. Shiva means the benevolent one, the auspicious one, the good, the beautiful, the truth and the consciousness. The Shiva component has three attributes: *sat*, the attribute of truth, *chit*, the attribute of consciousness, and *ananda*, bliss, contentment, fulfilment, wholeness. Sat-chit-ananda is the nature of this life power, the power of consciousness called Shiva.

Shakti also has three attributes: *iccha*, will, *kriya*, activity, and *jnana*, knowledge. Kriya shakti, jnana shakti and iccha shakti are the three attributes of this cosmic power of creation from the tantric perspective. Shakti separates from Shiva in order to create. In the stillness, vastness and silence of space, when vibrations emerge and each element or tattwa consolidates its natures, qualities and essence, at that time Shakti is separated. Just as we separate energy from matter, similarly, in the cosmic dimension energy separated from

consciousness. Energy separating from consciousness and coming into existence as a form, as an object, as material content, is the beginning of the Big Bang. Energy goes through a process of creation. Elements are formed, elemental masses are formed, gases are formed. Eventually, stars and planets come into existence. Eventually, the elements undergo further change in each star and planet to create the environment which will one day support life. Everything in creation has to support life, otherwise it is not part of creation. Even the so-called fiery planets or deserted planets of today will host life one day, because that is the nature of prakriti, the shakti. This is the natural course of the evolution of Shakti, whom we call the cosmic creatrix.

Until this point, until the formation of the elemental bodies, Shiva, consciousness, remains in its latent form. In the latent form it becomes all-pervasive. Energy cannot exist without consciousness, and consciousness cannot exist without energy. Evolution begins. Life is created. Life represents evolution, where the latent consciousness, the dormant consciousness, has to realize itself. Energy provided the platform for consciousness to become active and to realize itself. This cosmic fluke is called *lila*, the divine play, the play of Shiva and Shakti.

Consciousness evolves

Now Shiva emerges as consciousness and evolves as consciousness. The single-cell amoeba has consciousness. It may not have a nervous system or a brain, but it does have consciousness. It is living. Life is the parameter, the indicator of consciousness. It may not be intellectual like you, but it knows how to survive. It may not know good and bad, but despite its lack of knowledge the instinct of consciousness will make it survive, because consciousness represents life. That single-cell amoeba, which contains, consciousness also changes in the course of time. Life evolves.

Science says that life emerged from water. Tantra says the same thing. The aspect of Narayana or Vishnu emerged from water. Vishnu is always depicted as being in water. Shakti

provided the platform for Shiva. Shiva became the inherent consciousness in every aspect of creation. Life emerged as Narayana when consciousness began to realize itself. Therefore, just as the scientific theory is that life emerged from the ocean, in the Hindu theory of evolution, life was propagated by Narayana, who is associated with water. There is a beautiful statement:

*Jale Vishnuh thale Vishnurvishnuh parvatamastake
Jvaalaamaalaakule Vishnuh sarvam Vishnumayam jagat.*

Vishnu, the life-force, is everywhere, in the waters, in space, on land, on mountain tops, in the depth of the oceans. Everything is pervaded by the life-force called Vishnu. Vishnu is the catalyst to create plant life, animal life, bird life, insect life, human life, everything that moves or gives something to nature and is an active part of nature.

Even rocks have consciousness. In the book *Stalking the Wild Pendulum: Mechanics of Consciousness*, written in 1977, Itzhak Bentoff, a quantum physicist, showed that an inanimate object such as a rock can be charged with power and energy and that it can fulfil the wishes of the individual who charges it with energy. Symbols, statues and deities are made out of stone, yet because of the energy they receive, they become empowered to help others. The faith, conviction and belief you offer comes back to help you. Therefore, Indians have always accepted idol worship, maintaining they receive grace, help, love and compassion from the form they offer their feelings to. In the course of time, science will discover that there is a relationship between a human being and an inanimate object, between a human being and nature.

Shivalingam

The Shivalingam represents the unmanifest quality of Shiva. The image of Shiva we see seated on a snow-clad mountain is the manifest form of Shiva. *Lingam* means oval-shaped column. It does not mean phallus as Western interpreters

have said. It is said in the tantric scriptures that the first manifestation to emerge in nothing was a fiery lingam. The fiery lingam represented vitality, prana. Fire will burn only if there is oxygen. Fire will not burn in space alone. Fire is the subtle element which is being supported by the third element, air. Everything is happening in the fourth element, *akasha*, space. The Shivalingam is the first manifestation of Shiva consciousness, indicating life. Of course, all this happened in remote antiquity. Today we are only trying to interpret and understand what the visionaries felt, experienced and understood as the life connection between individuals and everything around them. We are all connected. The manifestation of Shiva as the fiery lingam is represented as the Shivalingam.

Transformation of consciousness through the chakras

Awareness has to develop of the different manifestations, behaviours and expressions of consciousness in the body. From the tantric perspective, in the body there are psychic centres called *chakras*, areas of both energy and consciousness. Energy and consciousness are integrally mixed in each chakra. The potency changes, the quality changes, the essence changes, the manifestation changes. Mooladhara chakra represents the lowest matter, earth. Earth is the container of life. After mooladhara comes swadhisthana, representing the water element. The water element represents the unknown mind. The mind is unknown to us. We don't even know what kind of thought will crop up next, or how we will respond in a given situation, whether it will be appropriate or destructive. We can't anticipate anything. The mind is unknown to us. That is swadhisthana. Mooladhara and swadhisthana are responsible for creation, procreation, generation, and are controlled by the black Shivalingam.

Then come manipura, the fire element, anahata, the air element, and vishuddhi, the space element. These three chakras are responsible for maintaining life, and are controlled by or guided by *dhumralingam*, the smoky lingam. Ajna and sahasrara are the centres for realizing the consciousness,

and they are guided and controlled by the *shwetalingam* or *jyotirlingam*, the luminous lingam.

The transcendental consciousness, the Paramshiva in our body, is experienced as black, as smoky and as luminous. Black represents the tamasic, conditioned nature, the outward nature of the individual. We all function in the dimension of the black lingam, the gross consciousness. Mooladhara and swadhisthana are active in our life today. Swadhisthana represents fears, insecurities, inferiority, inhibitions, all the mental limitations which do not allow the mind to take off. Mooladhara represents sexuality, sensuality, attraction to the material dimension. Attraction to objects is strong, without any analysis of whether it is our need or we just want to acquire it.

Our area of existence in the world is mooladhara and swadhisthana. That is where kundalini is stuck. Yoga says that if we awaken kundalini, we can come out from the tamasic, conditioned state of sensorial awareness to something more subtle. Kundalini yoga further states that we can awaken our kundalini, but if we do not maintain regular discipline and intensity in our practice, kundalini will again go back down. It will fluctuate from mooladhara to swadhisthana. It will only ascend once it has come to manipura. It will not go down, it will only ascend. In our conditioned state, often our motivations, drives and inspirations can change. We are caught up in the physical and psychological conditions which bind awareness to the body and do not allow it to perceive anything else beyond the body and physical, sensorial, sensual, mental, emotional and psychological needs.

Dhumralingam awareness

Manipura, anahata and vishuddhi are the chakras responsible for nourishing life. The first three chakras are for creating life, the next three are for nourishing life. This is the dimension of the dhumralingam, the rajasic state of consciousness defined as a smoky zone, a grey zone. Nothing is defined. Tamas is a conditioning, sattwa is a conditioning and rajas is the activity, the process we go through. Digesting food is an activity. It is not a mental state like fear in swadhisthana. Breathing in is

an activity. Communication, interaction, speech, breathing and digestion are activities which sustain life. This is the grey zone, the smoky, hazy zone of consciousness. It is known as craving, *ahara*. We crave food, we crave to live. Breathing represents living. We are trying to live, trying to assimilate, and through communication and interaction, we are trying to connect in order to feel part of human society. How this is managed depends on us. We can be aggressive or passive. We can overindulge or be restrained. Attitudinal yoga comes into play here. Manage your attitudes, manage your desires, manage your aspirations.

Buddha was once asked, “How do you know that a person is evolving in life? How do you know a person is becoming pure? How do you identify a person who is becoming enlightened?” Buddha replied, “Externally, if you look at those people, you will discover their needs and wants are few. They are not guided by their ambitions, not guided by their selfish nature, and when there is no selfishness, the needs become less.” As we overcome the cravings, which we continuously want to satisfy either in relation to food, emotions or communication, then they gradually reduce. When craving is restrained, we pass through the *dhumralingam* area into the *vyotirlingam* area, the luminous state of consciousness.

Jyotirlingam awareness

The *vyotirlingam*, the luminous state of consciousness, is governed by two chakras, *ajna* and *sahasrara*. *Ajna* is the intuitive mind and *sahasrara* is the universal consciousness. Once you come to *ajna*, logic, emotions, *samskaras* and *karmas* have no influence. Knowledge does not dictate how you behave or act. Even *jnana* has no role at this time. You only know how to live, act and think appropriately. You know it intuitively; you don't have to think or analyze. That is the quality of *ajna* chakra, the quality of illumined consciousness. That ability gradually expands more and more until it becomes part of the universal consciousness, the transformed consciousness. Individuality is still experienced in *ajna*, but at an intuitive level, not an intellectual, emotional or sensorial

level. Everything is happening because you are in harmony with all the forces and energies governing the world, the cosmos and your own life. The biorhythms of the planet, the body and the cosmos are in harmony with each other. You then cultivate and realize that universal consciousness and you become a siddha.

Jyotirlingam awareness, the awareness one has when established in ajna and sahasrara, is called God-realization, or attainment of Christ consciousness, or Krishna consciousness, or Shiva hood. It is as simple as that. After all, each person can give a name to a quality, but by giving different names, the quality does not change. However, according to their knowledge, cultural and social input, people understand something by a given name. Christ is not different to Shiva. Jesus was a person, but Christ was the consciousness which he attained. He was an ordinary person, but through *tapasya*, austerities, by following strict disciplines, by restraining the mind, restraining the senses, by connecting with wisdom, by cultivating awareness of the divine power, by realizing the connection that an individual has with that divine power, he was able to inspire and guide so many people that today Christianity is a civilization. That is one aspect of the impact that an enlightened being can have on society. They can create civilizations. I am not talking of the Christian church, but of the essence, which is eternal.

Yogic lifestyle changes the mind and consciousness

Our appreciation of life and our journey through life to discover peace, tranquillity, happiness and fulfilment should begin with the basic understanding that we have to create a change at the level of our mind and consciousness. This is where yoga becomes a lifestyle. There are four stages of experiencing yoga. The first is yoga practice, the second is yoga sadhana, the third is yoga lifestyle and the final stage is yogic culture. You start with yoga practice, a one or two hour class three times a week, on and off. There is no regularity, only a mental whim which dictates how you do yoga. Yoga sadhana is where yoga dictates what you should do, what you

should aspire for and attain. The effort you put into attaining it is yogic sadhana.

Sage Patanjali says that *chitta vritti nirodha* is yoga, but how many have taken that as your goal in life. What you have adopted is your need to do a little bit here and a little bit there, and saying you are a yogi. It is incorrect to claim you are a yogi if you are only pecking at yoga. You become a yogi when you follow the discipline of yoga. Your practice is not clear, your sadhana is not clear. You have never established yourself in any particular system. Yoga has not become a sadhana, it has only become something to do in your free time, or when you feel the need. In the course of time, practice should become sadhana at least for people who have spent six, seven, eight, ten years with yoga. After that you need to move on to a new class. You can't stay in the same class lifelong.

When yoga becomes sadhana, gradually it becomes a lifestyle. You can incorporate simple yoga practices, ideas, techniques at different times of the day, at different times of the week, to have a holistic experience of development. Once yoga takes root as lifestyle, it begins to change your perceptions, enlarge your heart and open your mind, and it becomes culture. When it becomes culture, you progress spiritually. You do not progress in the twenty minutes of meditation you do in a classroom with a teacher. That is only the process of learning. You are only learning the technique, how to do it, how not to do it. Don't expect anything great from that. When you have learned it, use it to explore and deepen your experience.

Mantra opens the doors of consciousness

Mantra initiation is also the way to progress. Mantra is considered to be the first and the last practice in yoga. Nothing before and nothing after. Each person has a particular mantra which responds to their individual frequency. There are common mantras which are universal in nature and which can vibrate all levels of the chakras. There are mantras which are for a specific purpose and are used to bring one person, one sadhaka, out of their shell. The mantras I give are a

combination of sounds affecting the different chakras to bring out and open up the different chakras together, not one by one, so that flowering and growth can be felt and realized by the individual as and when it happens.

The practice of mantra opens the perception of consciousness. It makes you aware of your consciousness. In Sanskrit, the word for initiation is *diksha*. In English, initiation means to begin something. *Diksha* is derived from the Sanskrit root which means acquiring vision, acquiring sight. Acquiring the vision to look inside is the literal meaning of the word *diksha*, not initiation. Vision is provided by mantra. Mantras do not reflect the identity of a particular deity or God of a particular tradition or culture or religion. The mantra *Rama* existed long before Rama was born. The mantra *Krishna* existed long before Krishna was born. The mantra *Om Namah Shivaya* existed long before the concept of Shiva in the manifest form was visualized. These mantras were heard as vibrations, as sounds by people in deep stages of meditation.

Mantras are sound frequencies. They are of two types, subsonic and supersonic. Subsonic means low frequency. *Bija* or seed mantras belong to this category. Supersonic mantras are the ones like *Om Namah Shivaya*, or *Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya*, because they have a higher range, a combination of different sounds. The normal range of sound is defined in decibels. The human ear can hear a certain range of decibels. Beyond that, sound exists at the upper and lower levels. Mantra practice changes the alignment of the vibrations in the body and harmonizes them. This happens at a subtle level. The body is a condensed form of vibrations.

Chanting mantras helps to harmonize the vibrations of the body which are emanating from the chakras in the form of different frequencies and ranges. If you look at the pictorial depiction of a chakra, it is symbolized as a lotus petal. On each petal a particular mantra is written, which is the frequency of that nerve plexus. Yogis have perceived that each chakra can be influenced by a certain vibration, a certain sound, a certain frequency, having its own range. These mantras influence the psychic centres at a vibratory level. Since the psychic centres

contain both consciousness and energy, both are released, so an altered state of consciousness and an altered state of energy is experienced.

Expanding the awareness

You use that altered state of consciousness to become aware at that level and to improve your performance at that level. For example, when you sleep at night, you dream. You don't control the dream, but there are times when you know that you are dreaming – lucid dreaming. While dreaming you are aware and you can guide the dream. That is awareness in the dream state. In the waking state it is impossible to be aware of it happening due to the amount of information going through the brain. Only the major things are perceived and the rest are passed by, but it is happening naturally. How much do you do wilfully? Are you aware of moments in time where you respond and act differently? Can you enlarge the scope of your awareness at this level? In walking meditation you become aware of yourself when you walk. Apply the same principle at other times too. When cooking or drinking water become aware of yourself doing these activities instead of doing everything mechanically.

Cultivating Spiritual Awareness

The more I read the ancient scriptures and investigate the traditions, the more it becomes clear that our approach to yoga and spiritual life is superficial. Our involvement with yoga begins with asana, pranayama, relaxation and concentration techniques, and we use them for a long time to feel better, but we have not actually developed a broader understanding of yogic concepts. We have not developed an understanding of the nature and spirit of yoga, which deals with the cultivation of spiritual life. How can we cultivate spiritual potential? How can we cultivate spiritual awareness? How can we cultivate spiritual qualities and how can they be expressed in our life?

Swami Satyananda has said many times that cultivation of spiritual awareness is the destiny of humankind. When we are able to cultivate spiritual awareness, our evolution in this dimension will be over and we will move to the next level of existence. The culmination of human life is realizing the spiritual potential, but spiritual potential has to be discovered in relation to the present situations and circumstances that we face and encounter in our day-to-day lives.

When Buddha was developing his own sadhanas and understanding, the only thought in his mind was how to overcome suffering and be free from distress. These thoughts propelled Buddha to the state of Buddhahood, where not only did he find solutions and answers to how to deal with suffering, but he also attained enlightenment.

Similarly, when yogis thought of yoga, they did not have any concept of God in mind. The purpose for the development of yoga was to explore the dormant nature. The concept that dealt with exploring the dormant nature was made visible in the practices and philosophies of kundalini yoga and kriya yoga.

All the other yoga practices support the human journey to discover inner potential through the body and mind. One can practise raja yoga, hatha yoga, bhakti yoga, jnana yoga, laya yoga, whatever yoga, but ultimately the focus goes to the awakening of kundalini. How can we awaken this quality which is all-encompassing? How can we explore the potential by which we can become better, have more understanding, balance and harmony in our life? How can we have a creative and optimistic state of mind by which we can understand the relationship that an individual has with nature and the divine?

Shiva yoga

One important personality played a major role in defining the process and concepts of yoga. That is Shiva. The identity of Shiva is internal, not external. The realization of Shiva is internal, not external. Yoga teaching was first given by Shiva. Through these teachings, which were originally called Shiva yogas, various branches of yoga came about like hatha yoga, raja yoga and other yogas. Just as the arms and legs are parts of the body, hatha yoga, raja yoga and the other yogas are part of Shiva yoga, which is the original name of yoga.

However, in the course of time, when religious and sectarian identifications started to influence the spiritual journey of the individual, the name Shiva was removed and only the word yoga was used. These changes happen all the time. Just as a society or a culture can change certain thoughts, practices and principles according to their need and understanding, in the same manner, over thousands of years, the social structures and social mentalities that developed and the religions that evolved gradually changed the name of Shiva yoga to yoga. They said Shiva was part of another

tradition – Shaivism, so Shiva was removed from yoga and made a religious figurehead.

It has to be remembered, however, that religions came much later in the history of humanity. The first questions were: Who am I? Where am I? Am I part of something? Am I a part of nothing? How do I live? How do I survive? Are there people beyond this Earth? Is there a supreme being somewhere? All ideas and philosophies develop out of enquiry. In this process of enquiry when the answer comes, an understanding develops. Enquiry leads to understanding, which then leads to applying that understanding in one's own life, and so it becomes a lifestyle.

Yoga started as a lifestyle. There was no need for anybody to practise yoga, like we do, because yoga was practised as a lifestyle every moment of the day. Awareness was cultivated and that is how people lived. During vedic times yoga existed as a lifestyle. It was socially accepted and everybody lived in that manner.

The soul is the life-force

Certain people then came who had some realization and understanding higher than the normal one. They said there was a spirit, an *atma*, a soul, which lived in earth, in water, in fire, in trees, in rock, in stone. From the yogic perspective the soul was defined as life, not as something extra in the body, but as the life-force. The soul represents life. Life will survive even if the senses and organs fail, even if the mind does not work, but if the spirit leaves, life goes with it. So, from the yogic perspective the soul has always been seen as the life-force.

As long as we have the life-force, we live; when it goes, we don't exist. They discovered that the soul is luminous in nature. The senses are material; they belong to the dimension of matter, creation, manifestation. The mind interacts with the world, but the soul has no activity. Just as we can perceive sensorial activity and realize mental activity, nobody has been able to know the function of the soul. We know the mental and physical functions, but the soul has no function. It is there as life-force, it is there because it exists.

Realize the life-force, the drashta nature

Yogis picked up this concept. The third sutra of Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* is *Tada drashtuh svarupe avasthanam* – Once you realize the *drashta*, the witness inside you, you realize your own true nature. The passive witness, the *drashta*, not the dynamic active power, is the soul. Realization of the life-force connects each and every aspect of creation. Realization of the life-force, attainment of the *drashta* nature, becomes the purpose of yoga.

If the soul is the *drashta*, the passive witness, then it is untainted by the influences of the senses and manifestations or creations. If it is pure, it is not influenced or affected by the outer world, and therefore it is self-luminous. The body needs a way to express itself, the mind needs a way to express itself, but the soul or spirit does not need a way to express itself. It is a link connecting everyone together. Due to its luminous nature, each individual is a luminous being.

Swami Sivananda begins his books with the words, “Blessed immortal souls.” He does not say, “How are you?” He says each one is an immortal soul and due to that immortality and purity, each one is a *deva*, an illumined being. We are all illumined human beings, but we don't know our true nature. One who knows their true nature and is the controller of everything is the highest *deva*, Brahman, Shiva, for that nature will always be benevolent. The divine is also always benevolent, life is benevolent. The entire universe is benevolent. The nature of the transcendental and the manifest qualities, Purusha and Prakriti, Shiva and Shakti, is benevolent. Even after we have misused all the resources given to us, globally and individually, when we die, life will start again. Sri Swamiji has said many times that life will never be destroyed, it will continue to evolve.

We identify life with our own body, with our own existence, but this may change. Prophecies and historical records have been discovered which say that in the past we were giants, but now we are pygmies. As time passes, our growth will be stunted. At the final cycle of the human yuga, the maximum growth of an individual will be no more than two feet. As the

earth, water, food and environment become polluted, the body will shrink. These are the prophecies of the different *yugas* or ages that we live in and have lived in. The external and the physical will definitely undergo change, but life will continue.

Develop spiritual consciousness

The only way that life can grow and flower in a more complete and holistic way is if we can develop our spiritual consciousness. Once we develop our spiritual consciousness, things will improve. There will be more positive qualities manifesting through the heart and through the head. More creative actions will be performed through the hands, more balance and harmony will be acquired, personally, globally, ecologically. If there is insensitivity, there will be destruction, which can now be seen happening around us. The insensitive, exploitative nature is destroying life, destroying the environment, destroying the globe. If we can go back to living in a harmonious way where the purity of life can be seen, expressed and lived, if we are able to act with sensitivity towards our environment, towards the world and towards our own selves, then our civilization will survive.

Shiva's Teachings on Yoga

Once a prince was isolated from society by his father, the king. There was a prophecy that the prince would either become a renowned emperor or an ascetic. The king did not want his son to become an ascetic, so he protected him from outside influences and did not allow him to leave the palace. When the young prince reached adulthood, he expressed the desire to visit the kingdom. The king made the necessary preparations, cleaned up the streets, removed the squatters and beggars and decorated the streets. The young prince set out in his chariot and travelled through the kingdom.

At one point, he saw an old person with wrinkled skin, stooped posture, frail limbs, walking with the support of a stick. The prince had never seen an old person before and it came as a shock. He had been protected so that he would not see suffering. He returned home and started to think, who is that person?

The next day again he expressed his desire to leave the palace. This time he saw a sick person lying on the road, his body covered with boils and flies, and he was unable to do anything about it. The prince went home again and started to think, what was that? He had never seen a sick person before.

On the third day, when he again went out to see the kingdom, he saw a body being carried to the cremation ground. He asked his charioteer what had happened to this man, and the charioteer told him the man was dead. The young prince asked, "Will I also die one day like that man?"

The charioteer said, “My prince, one day you will be sick and suffer, one day you will grow old and frail, and one day you will die. That is the reality of life.” The prince returned to the palace and started to think, “What is suffering? What causes suffering? How can suffering be overcome?” With these three questions in mind, he quietly left the palace at night, left his parents, his wife and young child, and went out into the unknown world all alone.

Suffering is an experience of the mind

Later, this young prince became Buddha. He discovered that suffering is an experience of the mind, that the mind causes suffering due to its attachments, associations, expectations and ambitions. He discovered that the way out of this suffering is through realizing the mind and bringing it back to its natural state of harmony, where it is not influenced by stones thrown in the lake. When a stone is thrown in a lake, ripples are created. Our mind is the recipient of these ripples which are coming from outside, from society, from family members, from every direction. Our mind responds to them one by one. Disassociating the mind from the influences which are affecting it will lead to freedom from suffering.

According to Buddha, the mind is real existence. We have to work through the mind; the mind has to be balanced, guided and controlled. Buddha was so focused on this thought that he did not answer other questions people asked him, whether on God, philosophy, lifestyle, or anything else. He said to forget everything, be a realist, learn to look at yourself and follow two principles: *karuna*, compassion, and *ahimsa*, the non-violent nature. Compassion begins with yourself. You don't have to express compassion for somebody else. When you are going through a crisis, you need to have compassion for yourself. Learn to accept, rather than negate. Learn to acknowledge, rather than reject. Learn to live in harmony with your mind, rather than struggling with it. Buddha developed the philosophy of *nirvana*, transcending the gross tendencies of the mind which give the experience of suffering, through compassion and a non-violent nature. The way to develop

compassion and a non-violent nature is through introspection, reflection and analysis, which became part of the meditative process.

Around this time, another prince from another kingdom had similar experiences. He also started to think about suffering. He also went on a personal quest to discover if it is possible to come out of the agony of existence and the frustrations that we confront. He later became Mahavir, one of the pillars of Jain philosophy. When these two people saw the struggle, anxiety, frustration, aggression and suffering in society, they thought about how to reduce it, so that people would be happier and society would be happier. They adopted a realistic and pragmatic approach.

Practice and lifestyle

Yoga has adopted the same method. Buddha did not speak of God, not because he was an atheist, but because that is not the need. Our need at present is to come out of states of suffering. Mahavir did not talk about God, not because he was an atheist, but because that is not the need. A blind person may want to see the sun, but that is not his need. His need is to acquire vision with which he can see the whole of creation. We have to understand what our present need is rather than going to some distant fantasy which we will not attain anyway, because we have not worked with the basics in life.

Yoga does not speak of God, but it is not called an atheistic philosophy. Yoga teachers impose their own ideas. They feel connected to something and therefore bring it into their own teachings. However, in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, there are only two references to the transcendental nature, *Ishvara pranidhana*, contemplation on the higher reality, the unchanging principle, the undecaying reality.

In Buddha's philosophy, in Mahavir's philosophy and in Sage Patanjali's philosophy, there is no heaven and no hell. Everything revolves around the individual's experience and how they are able to cope and interact in their life. This trend led to the evolution of a system of practices geared to

improving the quality of the mind, the emotions and the subtle areas within.

Buddha, Mahavir and Sage Patanjali are relatively recent personalities. Buddha and Mahavir lived 2,500 years ago, Sage Patanjali between 2,500 to maybe 3,000 BC. The systems developed by these seers existed in the form of practice and lifestyle. One of the biggest contributors to this system was Shiva in remote antiquity, and another was Krishna, who lived five thousand years ago.

Shiva and Parvati

Shiva, the propagator of yoga, was not God. He was a human being like you and me. He was a sadhaka, an ascetic living in remote areas in the mountains, in the jungles and forests, interacting as little as possible with society. By virtue of his life and his attainment, he became a powerful spiritual personality. He taught the subject of yoga for the first time to his wife, Parvati. They are historical figures, real people, not abstract ideas of some gods living in some remote corner of the mountains.

Shiva taught Parvati everything, from hatha yoga, to raja yoga, to kriya yoga, to kundalini yoga, to mantras, to astrology, to astronomy, to palmistry; all the so-called spiritual sciences and cosmological sciences. However, Shiva had made a pact with Parvati that she would not propagate what he had said to anybody. He said, “These practices are so powerful that they can change the destiny of an individual and people have to be ready to realize their destiny. When they are ready, these practices will have some meaning for them.” This was the pact Shiva made with Parvati.

Propagation of Shiva’s teachings on yoga

While Shiva was giving instructions on hatha yoga to Parvati, a person from the Matsya tribe was listening. Matsya is generally identified with fish, but it is the name of an animistic tribe. While Shiva was describing the teachings of hatha yoga to Parvati, she went to sleep. Matsya, the tribal person, acknowledged what Shiva was teaching instead of Parvati, and

Shiva thought that Parvati was listening. He was also lost in his own world, but when he realized that Parvati was sleeping and another person was answering him, he became furious. He decided to kill the person, but Parvati intervened and said, "Do not kill him. Make him your messenger, and give him the mandate to develop and propagate what you have told me." Shiva agreed and the tribal person, called Matsyendranath, became the founder of hatha yoga.

Therefore, the tradition of hatha yoga in the world began with Matsyendranath. He was the first teacher, and through him the entire system of the Nath sect, hatha yoga adepts, masters of the science of hatha yoga, developed. In the hatha yoga tradition there is a lineage of eighty-four teachers who have developed the subject of hatha yoga more and more. The hatha yoga we see today was the subject of the systems developed by these eighty-four siddhas. Much later, two important practitioners of hatha yoga wrote dissertations. Swatmarama wrote *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, and Sage Gheranda wrote *Gheranda Samhita*. So, the tradition of hatha yoga started in the world.

Similarly, when Shiva was teaching raja yoga to Parvati, again she went to sleep. A serpent from the Ananta tribe heard the teachings and again history repeated itself. Shiva was furious. Parvati intervened and Shiva gave this person instructions to go out and propagate what he had learned. Sage Patanjali is considered to be the incarnation of Ananta, the tribal person. As a result of yoga sadhana, his tribal mentality changed into a saintly mentality and he became recognized as Sage Patanjali. Sage Patanjali is the only one so far whose dissertation on raja yoga is universally accepted.

A similar thing happened with kundalini yoga and kriya yoga. Other people heard it and started to propagate it. The same happened with bhakti yoga. Bhakti was a secret teaching, but it was heard by Narada, a wandering ascetic, and Shandilya, a wandering sannyasin. Each one wrote a beautiful book. The *Bhakti Sutras* of Shandilya are one hundred percent psychological in nature. The *Bhakti Sutras* of Narada are one hundred percent devotional in nature. Both sides are

seen: what happens when the path of bhakti as devotion is followed, and what happens when the path of bhakti as personal transformation is followed. In this way, gradually in the course of time, the subject of yoga developed over many centuries.

In vedic India there was a tradition that anybody who sat on the seat of an enlightened being, adopted the name of that enlightened being. For example, there might be many Shandilyas, as his disciples who succeeded him were also called Shandilya. Through their disciples and successors, these people developed their subjects to such a degree that they were accepted universally as systems of life.

Moving from tamas to sattwa is the aim of life

When Shiva taught yoga to Parvati, he made it very clear that this body and this mind is only an instrument. We come from a source where we are free, not bound by the karmas, not bound by the samskaras, not conditioned by the outer nature. When we come into this body, we become conditioned. When we walk into a room, because of the four walls we are only aware of the room, not of what is outside, but when we leave the room, we are aware of the greater world beyond the four walls. Similarly, when we come into this body and become part of the manifest creation, our body, our mind and all the faculties are controlled and guided by the manifest nature. To shift from external identification back to internal identification and internal awareness is the journey that one has to undertake in order to realize one's natural being, one's naturalness.

Outer and inner identification are two extremes. The outer identification is tamasic, conditioned, and the inner awareness is sattvic, free, luminous. When the outer awareness is conditioned, the mind is interacting with the world. When internal awareness is developed, the mind begins to interact with the self. When there is outer connection through the senses and mind, we develop qualities which are useful to succeed in the outer dimension. When we go in, we have to cultivate qualities which will be useful for our internal growth.

We have tamas on one side and sattwa on the other side, the conditioned and the unconditioned, the bound and the free. We have to move from the tamasic state to the sattwic state. That became the goal and focus of life. From every perspective in yoga; classical yoga or traditional yoga, the aim of life is to move from tamas to sattwa. In this journey we explore our nature, our connections, our responses, our interactions, how things influence and affect us and how we can manage them in an efficient and effective manner. Learning to deal with everything is known as yoga. That is the real yoga.

Realizing the transcendental nature

Shiva then told Parvati that he was going away to a remote corner, to Kailash, where nobody could find him. He lived there and he attained samadhi. As he was a realized being, he said to Parvati that beyond this body there is another nature. Just as we say that beyond this body, our nature is transcendental, Shiva said the same thing, “I am embodied but I am not the body.” Parvati asked him, “Who are you?” He said, “I am the transcendental consciousness.” That is the realization which everyone has to attain, that they are transcendental, a part, an emanation of the transcendental nature.

Are the sun and the sun’s rays different? Yes and no. The further away one is from the sun, the sun’s rays are recognized as part of the sun, but the closer one is to the sun, there is no difference between the sun’s rays and the sun itself. Shiva used this example to indicate that when we are closer to our own nature, we become that luminous being, but as we move away from our nature, we begin to realize that there is something coming in between. Distance is being created by shakti, by *maya*, the power of illusion. This is how the concept of maya came into existence. Maya is separation and distancing from the source, and union is realizing the transcendental nature. We become one, we are not distant. If we go near the sun, we will burn and become part of it. When we come closer to the transcendental nature, the gross nature dissolves and we become part of the cosmic nature.

Those people who have become one with the cosmic nature are *siddhas*, but they still have a role to play. They have to maintain their duality, so they have to live in two dimensions or planes at the same time: the transcendental where they experience the unity of everything and the material where they identify with their body and the needs of the body, such as food, thirst and sleep. Siddhahood is the most difficult state to attain, because there needs to be perfect balance between transcendental awareness and material awareness. This realization has to dawn. Shiva indicated that this is the goal of life, “Beyond the body, there is my transcendental nature too, which is immortal, pervasive and universal.”

Creation and dissolution

Parvati then asked Shiva how he came into existence at the transcendental level. Shiva said that at the end of every age, dissolution takes place. Each age represents a period of time. Each cycle of time, from the beginning to its ultimate end, has so many years divided into *yugas*, specific time periods. When the cycle is complete, dissolution takes place, like the tide of the ocean. When the tide is coming in, the water spreads everywhere. When the tide is going out, the water recedes. When creation takes place, expansion happens. When dissolution happens, everything recedes. This is an ongoing process, and it is said to have happened twenty-seven times.

Scientists now accept the theory of multiple Big Bangs. They say that the Big Bang has happened not just once, but at least twenty times over a period of many millions of years. Perhaps when science has more sensitive instruments, they will discover that it has happened twenty-seven times. The Big Bang is creation. Dissolution is spreading oneself so thin that nothing exists. A ripple moves out from the centre of a lake, gradually losing intensity until it disappears; it doesn't return to the source. In the same manner, the entire universe is contained in one element – space. Space is the container of life, of the elements or *tattwas*. We still don't know where space begins and ends, but we know that there are many

universes, not only one. We know that there are many stars, planets, systems, galaxies, and so on. They are all spreading and moving away from each other and one day they will move away so far, that the whole thing will simply dissolve. We will also dissolve. Then there will be a time of peace and stability, for many millions of years. In this period of peace and stability, again a seed will begin to germinate and again another explosion will take place and again the process of creation will start. It continues to happen and it will continue to happen.

Shiva told Parvati that the four time periods, or *yugas*, make one *kalpa*, or complete cycle. When creation starts, that is the time of Satya Yuga, because everything is pure and untainted. Then, in the course of time, we move into another dimension, another time frame, where there is less purity due to the interaction with everything around us. Individual purity, global purity, cosmic and universal purity become less. As a result of the interaction happening at so many levels, changes take place and transformation happens. Satya Yuga becomes Treta Yuga. The third time period is Dwapara Yuga and the fourth time period is Kali Yuga.

We are existing in Kali Yuga. From the calculations it seems that Kali Yuga started about five thousand years ago and we still have approximately 420,000 more years of Kali Yuga. Then for a very long time there will be nothing, *shoonya*.

From Unmanifest to Manifest

When nothing exists and everything has dissolved into nothingness, then in that state, which is free from every kind of chaotic manifestation of prakriti, there is absolute stillness and silence which lasts for many thousands of years. In this state of stillness and silence, again the energy begins to stir. It manifests in the form of shimmering points of light in absolute darkness. These points of light become the foundation of life and creation once again. As they grow in intensity, all the energies and forces which are inherent in space in its latent, dormant form begin to come together at that point of light.

Three attributes of transcendental consciousness

Parvati asked Shiva if the shimmering light had a name. Shiva said that there are two names. One name is *Brahman*, which means the potential of expanding and developing. The other name is *Shiva*, the benevolent nature, the auspicious nature, the righteous nature. Parvati asked what the attributes are of the Brahman or Shiva nature. Shiva said that in that transcendental state, the cosmic nature has three inherent qualities: *sat*, meaning truth, the unchanging principle; *chit*, meaning the all-pervasive consciousness; and *ananda*, meaning happiness, bliss, contentment. Satchidananda is the essential nature of Brahman, it is the essential nature of Shiva. This can also be understood as Satyam, Shivam and Sundaram. *Satyam* again means the imperishable truth, *shivam* means consciousness which is benevolent, and *sundaram*

means beauty – and bliss is the outcome of beauty. The three attributes of the cosmic, transcendental consciousness are satyam, shivam, sundaram, or sat, chit and ananda.

Consciousness and energy

Parvati then asked Shiva how the three attributes or qualities of the transcendental nature become visible and manifest. Shiva told her that the transcendental nature is a combination of two qualities, two forces, the power of consciousness and energy. They are integrated; one is inherent in the other. Strength is inherent in the body. When you are in a passive state, the strength is dormant, but it manifests when you will it to. Just as heat is inherent in fire and light is inherent in the sun, similarly, consciousness and energy coexist together without separation or distinction. When the need comes through the will of consciousness, Shakti manifests.

First limb of creation

Parvati asked, “Does the transcendental consciousness also will, does it have desire, does it have thought?” Shiva said, “Yes. With the accumulation of so much potential, there is a natural need to manifest and to express those potentials.” In your own life, when you come to some point of realization or attainment, do you hide it from everyone or do you want to express it? An individual is a reflection of the divine, of the transcendental nature. The transcendental nature is supported by the existence of the individual. So whatever you are feeling and doing in this body happens at the cosmic level, on a subtle plane. Will comes in.

When all the powers, potentials and qualities gather and solidify in one place, at that moment a thought is generated. That thought is the beginning of creation, of existence, of life: *Ekoham Bahusyam*, I am one, I wish to multiply, I wish to become many. This is the seed thought responsible for life, existence, creation, development and growth. The same idea is reflected in this dimension in the form of the desire for progeny. It is an instinct. When this thought comes at the transcendental level, a split happens. Certain qualities

separate from the main body. These qualities are responsible for creation and for the maintenance of what is created.

When you want to create something, first you think about it, then you go through the action of creating what you have thought. After it is created, you have the responsibility for maintaining it. At that level, these two concepts are known as Narayana and Brahma. Brahma becomes the creator, the process of creating. Narayana or Vishnu becomes the sustainer to maintain what is created. These are the two energies which separate from the main body. This is the first limb of creation. When they separate from the main body of Shiva, we can say that is the first Big Bang. The explosion has taken place and now the material is slowly expanding and spreading.

Brahma and Narayana, creator and sustainer

At this point, Shiva is the passive one. The two energies that have separated are now the ones responsible for creating and maintaining. The main body, the Shiva body, is passive because it is the container of everything. There is no activity in it. It is the base, the foundation. It is said that the energy of Brahma, the creator, manifests in the form of the tattwas and elements responsible for the formation of the material universe, the galaxies, stars, planets, milky ways, solar systems, universes. The material universe is created with the energy of Brahma. We can even say that the energy of Brahma is the tattwa energy, the elemental energy, without which Brahma would not be able to do anything. There needs to be a mixture of elements to create something beautiful. Brahma represents these five elements, the permutations, the combinations and the final expression.

Narayana represents the emergence of life in this created world or worlds. Narayana, life, comes from the unconscious. Life evolves from unconscious to conscious. Imagine a seed. Inside the seed is the inherent potential to become a tree, and when the time is right, the seed sprouts. That is the quality of Narayana, the emergence of life from the unconscious, from the waters of swadhisthana. Darwinian Theory says that life emerged from the waters. Spiritual beliefs say that

life emerged from the waters, representing the absolute unconscious in seed form. The conscious form is the mature tree with trunk, branches, leaves, flowers and fruits. The unconscious form is the seed. Everything is contained. The big tree is contained in one small seed. The emergence of life or growth is the quality of Narayana

Brahma and Narayana have to function in harmony and in coordination with each other because they complement each other. Why does creation take place? To manifest the unmanifest nature. Sri Swamiji has said, “Why do birds exist? Why do insects exist? Why do animals exist? Why do humans exist? Their only purpose in existence is to manifest the unmanifest God.” This is the teaching that Shiva has given to Parvati, that these twin forces of creation and preservation, maintenance, nurturing, complement each other. They exist because the other one is there. Life has no role to play if there is no place for it to grow. The elements have no role to play if they cannot fulfil the conditions to bring forth life. So Shiva becomes the passive one. Narayana and Brahma become the active twin forces representing material creation and existence, life.

Role of shakti

Parvati then asked, “Where is shakti’s role, where is the power of energy?” Shiva said that without energy, nothing can be attained. One cannot do anything. To think, to act, to see, to hear, one needs to have energy. There is not a single place in the universe where energy does not exist.

When the twin forces of Brahma and Narayana emerged, they were conscious of themselves. Brahma knew that potency is needed to create, and Vishnu also knew that the potency of Vishnu is needed to create life. So there was a debate between the two forces as to which was greater. During this non-verbal debate, they encountered the shimmering, glimmering ball of light in front of them. They asked, “From where has this third radiance come?” Brahma said, “I am the material required for creation.” Vishnu said, “I am the material required for life and existence. What is this third component?” They decided

to investigate. Brahma went north and Vishnu went south to find where the ball of luminous light began and ended. For aeons, they tried to discover the extremities of this ball of light. However, they were unable to find its source, the beginning or the end, and they returned humbled.

Emergence of Aum

At that time, in that glimmering light, a vibration, a *spandan*, a movement was produced which became audible. The sound that emerged was *Aum*. That sound still exists in space. The *tanmatra* or subtle nature of the space tattwa is sound. *Aum* represented the verbalized, vocal, manifest nature of the transcendental quality. In the Devanagari script, A, U and M are the three letters that come together to create the sound *Aum*. With these three combinations, *Aum* emerged, which was identified as *spanda sharira*, the vibratory body of the transcendental nature.

In this vibratory body, when it was experienced by the devas, Brahma and Narayana, a rishi appeared from nowhere. *Rishi* means an enlightened being, a visionary, a seer. The rishi told the two devas not to be deluded by their own greatness and strength, but to remember that they were part of something else. “You have a purpose, you are born out of that, but the third principle from which you have come is eternal, it does not die, it is never born, it exists all the time.” Brahma and Vishnu asked how they could realize the third principle. The rishi told them it would only happen if they could forget their arrogance, be humble and submit themselves to the will of the divine. So these two forces submitted to the will of the third power, meaning that they were now in harmony with each other.

Emergence of the Shivalingam

At that time, the figure which emerged was the Shivalingam. A Shivalingam has two parts: the vertical lingam and the flat body or base. Tantrics believe that the lingam is the male principle, and the flat body, the *yonis*, is the female principle. Western interpreters have translated lingam as phallus, the

male organ, and yoni as vagina, the female organ. However, nowhere in Sanskrit does lingam mean phallus, not in the ancient texts or scriptures. *Lingam* simply means something which is emerging. *Yoni* means the ground from which the seed emerges. Earth is the yoni for all seeds. Without it, no growth would take place, not even a blade of grass would grow. Yoni is the container from which life emerges. What has emerged is the lingam.

Parvati asked Shiva, “In this image of the Shivalingam you have described an actual manifestation, or is it a personal experience?” Shiva said, “It is a personal experience which you realize to be the actual manifestation.” For somebody who has never tasted sugar or chocolate, their first taste is a personal experience, but after tasting it, they know what chocolate is like. That experience remains with them, it is actualized, it manifests, it becomes inherent in their life, part of the life process.

Shiva told Parvati that Shakti is inherent in the Shivalingam. In the flat base, which is the body of the Shivalingam, Shakti is inherent in the form of bhakti. In the vertical lingam, Shakti is inherent in the form of *kalaa*, manifestation. The flat base from which the lingam grows represents the continuity of time. In the continuity of time, we exist in space as an object. Our body is an object. Our individuality is experienced separately, different to the universe, different to other people, different to nature. We are independent units and therefore we are identified as independent objects. We exist in space governed by time. Our life is governed by time. In this journey of life from birth to death, our aspiration is to rediscover the source. That discovery of the source will happen through bhakti. Bhakti makes us aware of the spiritual nature, whereas maya makes us aware of the material nature.

Maya and bhakti

There is a story in the Puranas that Maya and Bhakti were two sisters. Maya was poor and wore tattered, dirty rags. Bhakti was glamorous and wore beautiful jewellery and clothes. People were always attracted to Bhakti because she was so

attractive, pure, peaceful and generous. They used to reject Maya because she was not really beautiful and had a crooked, devious, manipulative nature. Nobody even looked twice at her because of her old clothes. Maya was very jealous of Bhakti. She said, "Why does everyone follow my sister Bhakti and not me? It must be because of her clothes and jewellery." One morning Maya and Bhakti were bathing in the river. They had left their clothes on the river bank. Maya finished her bath quickly, put on Bhakti's dress and walked away. When Bhakti came out, she saw that her clothes had gone and she had no option but to wear Maya's tattered clothes.

Since that time, people have chased Maya, not Bhakti, because Maya is glamorous, bedecked with jewellery and wearing beautiful clothes. People want glamour. They don't care about the devious, crooked nature of Maya, but are attracted to her glamour. At the other extreme is Bhakti. Previously people had chased her, but now nobody looks at her. In this material dimension we are trained to see through our eyes and not through our hearts. The eyes see what is external and superficial. Only the heart sees the real nature. As long as Maya was wearing tattered clothes, everybody saw the raggedness of Maya and the beauty of Bhakti. When Maya wore glamorous clothes, everyone saw the glamour of Maya and the tattered clothes of Bhakti. However, those who can open the eyes of their heart will see the deviousness of the glamorous Maya and the purity of the pauper Bhakti.

Bhakti to realize the source

Bhakti becomes the process by which we can come back to the realization of our source. In the journey through life, ultimately we have to come to bhakti if we want to evolve spiritually. Swami Sivananda has said it many times, "You can practise anything you want, to experience physical and mental wellbeing, but ultimately, for spiritual realization you will have to forget even jnana and come to bhakti, for at one point knowledge impedes the growth of human nature."

Sri Aurobindo has said, "In the beginning intellect was my helper, my guide and my friend, but at the end it became

the barrier and my worst enemy.” Yogis have said that too. Salvation is possible only when we are able to open our hearts and to realize our soft nature, the benevolent qualities of life. People often think that if they speak very gently and softly, they are pure, spiritual and divine. However, the purity and softness of the heart is not what you express through speech or behaviour or action, rather it is what you cultivate in your life as the positive and appropriate nature, leading to your development and attainment.

Compassion, love, sympathy and understanding are the soft nature, not aggressiveness, hardness or rigidity. Arrogance, jealousy and hatred are hard, raga and dwesha are hard. Cultivating the soft nature is the aim of bhakti, taking you from the head space into the heart space. Maya is the opposite; it makes one hard, crooked, devious, aggressive, selfish and manipulative. Bhakti has to be the last sadhana of our life. After going through every kind of physical gymnastics, mental gymnastics and emotional gymnastics come to a point where you can become fixed, stable, peaceful and pure. Bhakti has been defined in two ways by Narada and Shandilya. Shandilya’s *Bhakti Sutras* number one hundred, and describe the whole process of bhakti as a way to soften and to purify our inner self, as a process to transform our hard qualities and acquire the soft qualities. Narada describes bhakti as a means of devotion and worship of God. Both processes are accepted, a process by which we can open ourselves, and a process by which we can appreciate and celebrate the existence of life. This concept of bhakti is represented in the base of the Shivalingam, which represents the movement of time through life, through existence, through creation.

In the vertical lingam, bhakti is *kalaa*, qualitative manifestation. According to tantra there are five kalaas which are part of Shakti. According to tantra there are nine forms of bhakti. These are part of Shakti, *kalaa*, manifestation. In yogic terminology, the five expressions of Shakti in the vertical lingam are *kriya shakti*, the power of action, *jnana shakti*, the power of knowing, *sankalpa shakti*, the power of willing, *shanti shakti*, the power of peace, and *ekta shakti*, the power of union

between the two where all dualities are dissolved. The vertical lingam signifies the emergence of consciousness.

Live in the present, not in dreams

In infinite time and infinite space, our life is only a spike in that infinite timeline. That spike makes us aware of our individuality for the period of time we live on this planet. It is in this period that we experiment with ourselves, with our consciousness, and we try to develop, grow and evolve. Our association with consciousness is only for a limited time. In this time we try to realize our inner nature without any preparation, hoping for a quick realization.

Our attempt to discover ourselves is very limited. There is no clear focus or motivation to follow the trail to the end; we stop halfway in between. If we hear that somebody is giving shaktipat, or awakening kundalini by touch, everybody will go there, but I have not seen any awakened kundalinis in fifty years, despite the claims of so many masters. It indicates that there is no groundwork. We are just chasing fantasies and dreams, without realizing what is necessary. We are chasing a mirage, dreams generated by the mind, without the mind creating a stable foundation for growth and development.

This is where yoga is different to other traditions. Yoga says, don't chase your dreams, but become aware of how you live right now, in the present. If you improve your present, your future is secure, but if you ignore your present, then your future is uncertain. Therefore, most of the teachers say that the highest teaching is to live in the present, but they are not clear about it. They have heard it, they liked it and they say it, but they have not analyzed it. Otherwise they would have discovered that becoming aware of the present is a very deep and intense sadhana, more important and fulfilling than the two hours of meditation they may want to do every day. In meditation you are chasing a fantasy without improving the outer or the inner experience, the inner mind, the senses. There is no restraint, no friendship, no compassion towards ourselves; we are not friends with ourselves.

Become friends with the mind

Sri Swamiji has said, “My achievement has been that I have been able to make friends with my mind.” It is important that you make friends with the mind because you have to live and sleep with the mind. You can divorce your wife or husband, but you can’t divorce your mind. Every night you go to sleep with the mind that you are fighting with every day, so where is peace in your life? When you are awake you are disturbed. When you are alone you are disturbed. When you are with people you are disturbed. Have you ever found peace within yourself?

Don’t make the mind your enemy, for then you will never be happy or peaceful. Convert your mind into a friend who can support you, inspire you, encourage you and motivate you. That is the biggest challenge. Every sadhaka, every practitioner, faces this challenge at one time in their life. Even the basic mantra meditation can never be successful, for after ten mantras the mind goes away somewhere. Again you bring the mind back and half a minute later you discover it has gone to the USA. Then again you bring your mind back and one minute later you discover that it has gone to Byron Bay, travelling around with a friend or family member in memories of the past. Then again you pull the mind back. It is a constant struggle. You can’t even complete one mala of mantra peacefully.

Sri Swamiji has given us a solution. Mantra is the means to make friends with the mind. His exact words are, “I water the plant of life with mantra every morning and every night. I have left yoga but I have never left mantra.” He does his mantra every morning and every night to water the plant of life. That is the only way to be friends with the mind.

Mind, consciousness and energy

The mind expresses the qualities of consciousness and energy. The mind is the interactive principle of life between soul and matter. Without the mind your relationship to the world of sense objects and your understanding of the internal self is zero. Mind is the interactive principle, giving realization of

the material, external and of the internal, subtle. The mind expresses the qualities of kriya shakti, the creative, dynamic nature, jnana shakti, knowing, understanding, realizing, sankalpa shakti, will, conviction, firmness, and shanti shakti, the power of peace. Being at peace with yourself is a power, a strength that can change natures, that can change situations, that can change the environment. There is so much strength in the power of peace. The fifth expression is ekta shakti, where the dualities are converted into unity, the experience of 'I am That', *Aham Brahmasmi*. That idea is a permanent realization that 'I am not different, I am one and there is no difference between me and anything else'. There is equal vision, unified vision, harmonious vision. These are the kalaas or manifestations of Shakti inherent in the Shivalingam, consciousness.

Three forms of Shiva

Then Parvati asked how consciousness and energy, in their manifest form, became the Shivalingam and what does the Shivalingam represent. Shiva said, "I have three bodies. First was the body of vibration, the sound of *Aum*, experienced by the *devas*, the transcendental beings, Narayana and Brahma. They were guided by the *rishi*, the seer the visionary. It was the grace of the rishi, maybe Shiva himself in the form of the rishi, who gave them an understanding of the vibratory body of Shiva, of vibration or spandan being the first manifestation of cosmic existence. The second form of realization of my existence is the Shivalingam in which Shakti and Shiva are both seen as integral parts. Shiva is passive and Shakti is active in the Shivalingam. Third is the actual physical form through which I am talking to you as a person. That energy has descended in this body. Energy is moving the body, energy is moving the senses, consciousness is moving the senses, consciousness is guiding everything, energy is guiding everything in this body – this is the manifest form of Shiva."

The three forms of Shiva are vibration, the unmanifest nature as consciousness and energy in the form of the Shivalingam, and the manifest nature as the body. These are the

three bodies of Shiva. In this way, Shiva continued to describe to Parvati how this body and the transcendental are reflecting the qualities of one into the other.

Karma and reincarnation

Parvati then asked Shiva, “Why do we forget what we were?” Shiva said that is the nature of prakriti. In order to develop life, prakriti makes us forget what we were before. We don’t know how many lives we have lived; we only remember this life. Some people do remember their past lives and there is plenty of scientific research to prove that past reincarnations are real, undeniable. Various cultures have rejected the idea of reincarnation, but by rejecting the idea of reincarnation you do not stop taking birth again, with past samskaras and karmas. That is the karmic theory, that evolution goes on. You can uproot a blade of grass, but you cannot destroy the potential which will make the grass grow again. Without the forgetful nature, life could not be lived; it would become a living hell. If you remembered who you were in the past, you would disconnect from the present life and start wandering in your past, and there would be no growth in this life. Past memories would make the present life absolute hell. Therefore, nature has created a block so you cannot know your past. As you age, even your childhood becomes a remote memory. This is the natural lock that Shakti has built into our system so that we can enjoy the present life and prepare for the next one. Therefore, our journey always begins ‘now’.

Past karmas and *samskaras*, or impressions, are carried over, and they make up the human character. We are what we are because of our previous karmas and samskaras, but we can’t know how they have brought us to this point. A fire may come raging down the mountain and destroy all the trees in its path, but, after some time the same trees will sprout again. Something was left behind which will ensure that a new life will emerge once again. Therefore, it is difficult to understand the theories of karma. People have written about it and speculated on the subject, but once we begin to realize

the need and the nature of the karmic influence, we will discover that there is no need to write anything about it, or even to speak about it, as it is impossible to relate to. There is no reference point of a samskara or a karmic influence; it is only guess work. People who write about karma and karmic theories are shooting in the dark. It is only an intellectual exercise without realizing the actual influence that samskara or karma has on an individual.

We have come to this point in life because of past actions which are responsible for the development of our nature, character and personality, aspiration and desire. Management of karma is the theme of the yoga practices. The practice of asana, pranayama, yoga nidra, meditation, pratyahara, dharana, and dhyana, will ultimately begin to realign the karmic and samskaric influences in our life. Meditation clears out negative karmas. Sadhanas create positive karmas. Service creates positive karmas. Bhakti creates positive karmas. The positive association is what we need. Due to this karmic influence we get stuck in one particular field or area of existence, experience, ideology and thought, like the frog living in a well.

The conditioned mind

A frog was born and lived all its life in a well. One day there was a big storm and another frog fell into the well. The well frog asked where its home was. The visitor frog said, "It's very big, it's called the ocean." The well frog gave a jump and said, "Is it as big as this jump?" The visitor frog said it was much bigger. The well frog gave a bigger jump, but the visitor frog said its home was much bigger. "Is it as big as my well?" asked the well frog. The visitor frog said, "A million times bigger." The well frog said, "Nothing can be bigger or better than the place where I am." That is the conditioned nature. The character, the personality with which we come is conditioned.

We identify with things that fit into our concepts and we tend to reject ideas which shake or alter our ideas and beliefs. Rigidity sets in. If we are able to go through that rigid nature one way or another, and become aware that there might be

some place bigger than our well, acceptance begins to happen more naturally and spontaneously, and rigidity goes down. However, if we are unable to access inside, conflict takes place: “Mine is the only way.” The other person says, “No, mine is the only way.” So, there is a fight, but if we can access inside, then we will say, “Mine is also a way.” Harmony, peace and balance come in and rigidity goes down.

When we are conditioned, our mind is conditioned only to experience the material. The senses of the body are used to interact with the world which is populated by sense objects. The senses reject anything that does not fall in the category of sense objects. We will reject anything that tries to change our mental framework. The mind is also geared to interact and express the qualities in relation to material life, and access to spiritual life is difficult.

We don't know how spirituality begins in our life. Some people say spiritual life begins by being compassionate, some by being religious, others by becoming a devout worshipper. Each one defines how they can become better by using the external methods which are visible. In reality, spirituality begins with the development of understanding, not by meditation. We can meditate for years and have no understanding; that is time wasted. We may never meditate, but have understanding; that is time gained. Understanding represents an openness of mind and openness of heart to receive new information, to digest it, to assimilate it, to use it, to file it in the memory banks, and when the time is right, bring it out again, retrieve it from the computer.

Our identification with the senses and sense objects distracts us from realizing the inner nature. The nature of the world is such that, although nature is benevolent, the spirit is benevolent, you as an individual, I as an individual, humans as individuals, are too selfish to be benevolent, due to the mental quality of *tamas*, the conditioned mind.

Pashupata Tantra

Brahma and Narayana are two powers or forces responsible for the creation of the material world and for life to evolve in the material world. When life evolves in the material world, that spontaneous and free expression of life is contained by matter. It becomes limited and restricted in its expressions, and is conditioned. It is like taking water from the ocean and putting it in a bottle. In the ocean, water covers a large area, but when we put some in a bottle and seal it, it becomes different to the waters of the ocean. There are no waves, no currents, the water becomes still. Similarly, when life enters the material dimension, it is contained by the body and by the senses. It is restricted by the limitations of the body, the senses and the mind. Restriction is the natural conditioning in which human beings exist, develop, live, laugh, play games and do all the things they normally do.

Conditioned nature

Due to the conditioned nature, we are unable to experience inner expansiveness or freedom. If it were to remain like this, growth would not be possible. Somebody has to open the bottle and pour the water into the ocean. The third force is consciousness. That is the power, the force of Shiva, which comes in between the container, which is Brahma, and the contained, which is Narayana, to again give a broader and freer expression to this life experience.

Conditioning is difficult to understand and deal with. A simple example: when I asked you to repeat the shanti mantras after me, it did not register, as everyone is conditioned to saying it together. It is a habit; you flow with what you are conditioned to do. Where was the awareness at that time? Where was the listening ability? Why was that instruction not registered by the brain or by the mind? That is one type of conditioning that you deal with in your daily routine, being habituated to different situations and events and the interactive mind behaving according to that nature.

The mind is an extension of consciousness, not a separate entity. It is like the ocean and a tributary running inland. You cannot see the ocean but you can see the tributary. That is our mind. The mind is responsible for our identification, due to its natural conditioning. It is responsible for identification with the world of senses and sense objects. When identification takes place with sense objects, the entire nature of the mind changes. Attraction and repulsion, *raga* and *dvesha*, play an important role in defining personal association with the outer world. That is the theory of the *Yoga Sutras*. We are attracted to sense objects which give us pleasure and we reject sense objects that do not give us pleasure. This is the dual nature of the mind. The mind fluctuates between *raga* and *dvesha* which become the cause of experiencing suffering in this life. Suffering becomes the hallmark of human life.

For this reason Buddha started thinking about suffering, the causes of suffering and how to overcome it. Yoga has thought along the same lines. First you have to know yourself and understand what attaches you to the outer world. Understand how you associate with people and improve your associations, not only with people but also with your own inner nature, with your own mind.

Pashupata tantra

Shiva told Parvati that this conditioned state of existence is like a noose which binds people to a particular state of experience and existence. Every created being, from insect to human being, is caught by the noose of nature. Only the

higher self, which exists beyond the realm of nature, is free from the bondage of the noose.

Pashupata tantra was the first tantra to come out of Shiva's teachings. *Pashu* means animal, one who is bound. We are animals who are bound. Something is controlling us. Just as we control a horse with a bridle or a dog with a leash, the transcendental nature controls us. The transcendental nature is free from any kind of bondage. If we become aware of the relevance of the transcendental nature in our life as part of the natural process of human evolution, the awareness being developed of this inner nature or higher nature liberates us from the bondage of the gross nature.

This is the theory of Pashupata tantra, the animal and master tantra. Pashu is the animal who is bound. Prakriti, which binds us, will ensure that we live according to the rules and laws of nature. The escape route from suffering is sadhana. Sadhana creates a conditioning which allows us to understand life and to improve our expressions. Nothing changes in the outer dimension, but our involvement, understanding and expression of our potentials make the difference in releasing us from the little pin pricks that bug us every moment. Nothing has to change on the outside. Everything is governed according to the natural law. We have to look inside.

Process of meditation

Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita* that identification with sense objects creates attachment. Attachment creates desire, desire creates motivation. If that desire is not fulfilled, it will bring forth a more dynamic nature of the mind, the assertive nature. With that assertive nature we will lose the broad perspective and be focused like a horse wearing blinkers, or develop tunnel vision. Buddha, Sri Krishna and others concluded that the only way to overcome human suffering was to manage the mind. Therefore, Buddha never spoke about spirit, or the higher reality. He said, learn how to manage yourself by becoming aware. That awareness has to be cultivated through meditation.

In Sage Patanjali's raja yoga system, the last four stages of yoga are meditative: pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. The previous stages of yoga are different; asana is physical, pranayama is pranic, yamas are cultivating a positive mind and niyamas are systems or disciplines that regulate external expression and behaviour. So the first four components are different to each other. The last four are all meditative in nature, indicating that we can go through a gradual adjustment, modification and fine-tuning of our life in general, but spend more time in discovering ourselves.

The process of meditation does not begin with identification with the highest. It begins with relaxation in pratyahara. It begins with development of awareness in pratyahara, realization and discovery of our mind, detaching from negative associations and cultivating positive associations in pratyahara. If we can just focus on perfecting the stages of pratyahara without thinking about higher meditations, pratyahara will prove to be the shortcut. One goes through a systematic sequence of harnessing the inner potential, the inner awareness and of realizing that inner quality. In higher states of meditation there is no base for the mind, nothing the mind can identify with, except an abstract idea. 'I am meditating on light' is an abstract idea. What kind of light do you imagine? Bulb, tube light, firelight, starlight, sunlight, white light, pink light, yellow light, blue light. Many of us will say, "I feel comfortable when I meditate on blue light." Meditation for us is discovering our comfort zone. It is not a sadhana. There is no attempt to make meditation a sadhana. Meditation becomes a way to release stress. Meditation becomes a way to develop some awareness of some subtle processes taking place in the body, which we can't even understand. The body undergoes spontaneous energy movements and we don't know how to manage that.

As a sadhaka, one has to follow the sequence and system and become an adept in it, perfect it, before moving into the next state of mental awareness. You have to solidify the previous state. That becomes the foundation on which you step to go to the next level. This is the theory of Pashupata tantra.

Outer to inner perception

Parvati raised another question. When does one know the time has come to change the perceptions from outer to inner? Is it distinct? Can anybody will it? When does it happen? Shiva told Parvati that it can be called destined, but it is not destiny. When the stomach is full, you are satisfied and there is no hunger, but when the food is digested, gradually again hunger builds up and you eat again. Feeling hungry is a natural state of the body, and to satisfy hunger you need to put in effort and cook a meal. Making the effort to satisfy your hunger is the process of sadhana.

The system and sequence of sadhana can be seen in the process of cooking. First you prepare the vegies, cut them up and keep them ready. You collect everything and prepare everything. Then you boil the water. As the water takes a while to boil, first you add hard vegetables, like potatoes, which take a long time to cook, and add the spinach last because it takes a short time to cook. You add salt or other spices according to taste. There is an awareness that everything has to be in the right quantities. Not one kilo of potatoes, one kilo of salt, one litre of water, one kilo of condiments and one kilo of spinach. Everything has to be in proportion or you will not be able to eat it. Swami Sivananda said, "Eat a little, drink a little, talk a little, sleep a little, meditate a little, walk a little." He never said splurge. He said do everything a little so that you can handle it.

You forget that your body is like a battery. A battery has limited energy, which will become depleted depending on how you use it. If you put a new battery in a torch and use it sparingly, the battery will last more than a month, but if you leave the torch on all night, in the morning you will have to change the battery again. The body is like a battery, the brain is like a battery; the more you use the brain's energy, the sooner brain fatigue will set in. The more you use muscular energy, muscular fatigue will set in. The more you use mental energy, mental fatigue will set in. If you use your emotional energy, emotional fatigue will set in. The whole of life becomes a chronic fatigue syndrome. If the battery is totally flat, it is

an indication that your energies are fully depleted because you have misused or abused the battery power. If you use it properly, the same battery will last a long time. This is also one of the secrets of longevity.

We hear of yogis who are disconnected from everything and live a hundred years, whereas normal people are having heart attacks by the time they are forty-five, a midlife crisis in their fifties and in their seventies they are unfit to be part of the life they have lived until then. Restrictions, limitations, weaknesses and illnesses come, strength and clarity go, the senses become dull due to overusing the energy of the body, brain, mind and emotions.

Regulating the energy

To regulate the use of energy, the yogis, tantras and other traditions have prescribed sitting quietly. The problem is that people are not used to sitting quietly. Something is happening all the time. In normal life, forget about yogic life, in twenty-four hours of the day, in your home, with your family, in society, when can you sit down for ten or fifteen minutes and say, “OK, now I am going to relax and release the pressures that are building up in my mind, in my emotions, in my body.” These pressures are never released. It is like a pressure cooker; the steam builds up and one day an explosion takes place.

You clean your house regularly because the understanding is that dust and grime are unhygienic, but what about all the dirt accumulated within in this journey of life? One week’s accumulation of stress you try to release in one or two hours of yoga practice per week. It is like pouring so many litres of water into a tank every day and releasing the water for one hour every day, but filling the tank the whole day. Eventually the tank will be so full that it will overspill because not enough water is being released.

That is the meditation process, releasing what has been accumulated to again experience passivity, tranquillity, harmony and balance of mind, to recharge yourself, so that you are fresh again the next day. You have released everything that you have accumulated the previous day. The energy has

been built up, the fatigue has gone and again you are ready to face the world and interact with it. This is the teaching that Shiva gave to Parvati.

The entire system of yoga and tantra developed from this basic idea contained in Pashupata tantra, which was the first tantra to come out from the teachings of Shiva. In the course of time, as people became more adept and perfect in understanding this process, they developed the other aspects of tantra as well. *Tantra* means expansion of consciousness and liberation of energy. The whole system of tantra is based on cultivating consciousness and releasing energy. By looking at the tradition and how people in the past practised and came to the finer experiences of tantra, it can be seen that the yogis and tantrics followed a definite system of sadhana in which they were able to free the energy in the body and free the consciousness from its outer identification.

Chakras: stepping stones to evolution

Parvati asked Shiva “How can we liberate the energy and realize the consciousness in this life?” Shiva said that although life is material, controlled and governed by the senses and matter, desires and expectations, in this life there are certain natural stepping-stones for people to evolve and develop. These stepping-stones are represented as chakras: mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, ajna and sahasrara. Each chakra is governed by a Shivalingam.

The base chakras, mooladhara and swadhisthana, are governed by an aspect of the Shivalingam which is black in nature, tamasic in nature. Shivalingam is the manifestation of energy along with consciousness. Just as sweetness is contained in a grain of sugar, similarly Shiva and Shakti coexist in the form of the Shivalingam. The first two chakras represent material identification, sensorial identification, gross identification, sexuality, identification with life, insecurity and fear of losing life. Mooladhara is the Brahma component. Matter is being created from mooladhara, and life in matter is created by swadhisthana, the two forces of Brahma and Narayana. Swadhisthana represents identification with life

and insecurity, fear of disconnecting from life. Mooladhara represents creation of a gross, material body. Matter and life, governed by nature, are governed by the black Shivalingam, representing the gross, tamasic nature.

As you come out of the tamasic state, there is another manifestation, which is the smoky, hazy Shivalingam, called dhumralingam. *Dhumra* means hazy, smoky. The dhumralingam represents mental states or expressions which are not properly defined, as in manipura. When do you feel aggression, motivation, dynamism? It is not defined for it changes from situation to situation. Anahata is emotion. Just like the weather changes every moment, so do emotions and sentiments change according to the situation. Vishuddhi, the expressive ability, also changes according to situations. So manipura, anahata and vishuddhi are the grey area, because according to the situation a different response will manifest according to the chakra. You can never predict what the response will be.

You can predict the outcome of the sexuality of mooladhara, the emergence of a body from the womb. You can predict the basic nature of that body, because of swadhisthana, association and attachment to life, and even instinctively, the sense of self-preservation is strongest. However, manipura, anahata and vishuddhi are instantaneous responses to a given situation or event with which we identify, relate or interact. This is where all the problems are. Emotional problems come up, communication problems come up, and manipura problems where the drive, motivation or inspiration can become high or low.

These three chakras go through swings, up and down, up and down. To begin with, the sadhanas deal more with this aspect in the hazy lingam. After you have managed the hazy lingam, you deal with the Shivalingam, the black lingam at the base. So first you harmonize vishuddhi, anahata and manipura. When you are comfortable with yourself at this level, you move into the instinctive level and learn how to manage the lower functions of the chakras.

Once you are able to manage that, you come up to the higher level, where the identity of the Shivalingam is

luminous. Ajna is controlled by that luminous Shivalingam. Ajna is the intuitive nature, the seat of guru, the guide, the realization that something is propelling you, something is carrying you. Sahasrara is the ultimate realization. You think you are alone and suffer from fears and insecurity, forgetting that watching over you is the higher self, who knows how to nurture and not destroy life.

Connecting with sattwa

These three states, manifestations or Shivalingams in the body, are represented by the chakra systems. They are symbolic representations, indicating the experience that every individual goes through in life. From vishuddhi, to mooladhara, all your experiences are tamasic. Only in ajna do you have the experience of sattwa. There is no sattwa experience in sahasrara, because you become that. In sahasrara, total dissolution takes place. There is no awareness of you and me as separate beings. Rather the vision of oneness develops. Ajna chakra is the most important chakra because it connects us with sattwa. The chakras from vishuddhi down are tamasic. You may wonder, if everything is tamasic and sattwic, then what is rajasic? Rajasic means the effort that you put in. If hunger is tamasic and eating food represents sattwa, fulfilment, preparing the meal is the rajasic action.

There are two shores with a river in between. The river is life. One shore is tamas, one shore is sattwa and the bridge from tamas to sattwa is rajas, for it allows you to move from one particular state of existence to another. The effort that you make to attain anything in life is rajas, hence the name raja yoga. Raja yoga is not the kingly yoga, as people have interpreted the word raja. Raja is the short form of rajasic, so instead of saying rajasic yoga, we say raja yoga, the abbreviated form. Raja yoga becomes the bridge to take you from tamasic conditioning to sattwic conditioning. On this bridge, you have to go through the eight levels of experience, perfection and attainment before you become sattwic.

Yoga and Spiritual Life

In the last few years the demand and the need for yoga has increased enormously around the globe. People around the world are craving the teachings of yoga. Not only are the demands being met, but we are also developing systems and paths along the way, not only in relation to yoga but also in relation to social development and human upliftment.

The propagator of yoga in our tradition was Swami Sivananda. He believed in humanism. He said yoga is not only a way to give people a new direction in life, but also a way to learn to care for other people who need help. His teaching was: serve, love, give, purify, be good, do good, meditate, realize. He always believed that yoga would prepare the ground for people to become spiritual. By learning how to connect with other people, to love other people, to serve other people, to share with other people and give to other people, you can feel satisfied, happy and purify your mind and nature. So the teachings of Swami Sivananda had two aspects: the yoga aspect and the human aspect.

As long as Swami Satyananda was working for yoga, as per the mandate of Swami Sivananda, he was totally focused and one-pointed on the propagation of yoga. His intention was to develop yoga as an academic subject, as a science, without the influence of cultural or religious impositions. Nowhere did he include any component of religion or culture in the system of yoga. Once he established yoga as a subject, as a science, he moved to the other aspect of Swami Sivananda's

teaching, which is now coming to fruition in Rikhia. Munger represents the yoga component and Rikhia represents the human component, the teaching that Swami Sivananda has conveyed to us. At present we are involved with yoga, but as we grow in yoga we also have to become involved with human beings.

Levels of teaching yoga

Let us first look at the yogic process. At the base level we have the practitioners of yoga, people who need yoga. Teachers bring yoga to them. There are two categories of teachers, the new teachers with little experience and the senior teachers who have a lot of experience. Our effort has been to slowly build up a network of new teachers and senior teachers, teachers with many years of experience, so that knowledge can be spread around and the experience that has been gained can be shared with other people. These teachers do not necessarily have a centre, an ashram or a place to function, but they are out there in society, offering their service in different areas, whether it be in the corporate world, whether it be individual teaching, in a school building, in a club, or in a private home. These teachers are valuable because they are the ones who are actually reaching out to people.

One example is that when we made a list of Satyananda Yoga teachers working in different cities in India, we discovered that there are sixty teachers working independently or in an individual capacity in Delhi, about seventy in Kolkata, about fifty in Mumbai. Each city has a large number of yoga teachers who are working independently and bringing the teachings of yoga to people who need it. In Delhi we don't have a yoga centre but a solid team of teachers. In Mumbai we don't have a yoga centre but a strong group of teachers. In Kolkata we don't have a yoga centre but a solid group of yoga teachers. In other cities, towns and locations, there are also a good number of trained yoga educators. It is similar in Australia. There are yoga teachers working in many different areas in the country, with few ashrams and few centres. These teachers are a most valuable resource.

At the third level, we have city centres manned by experienced yoga teachers who are committed, devoted and dedicated to ensure that the teaching of yoga coming through those centres meets the social demands. Teachers who work in those centres go to correctional facilities, clubs, colleges, schools, and management centres, where they teach relaxation, stress management, and conduct specific programs and courses for disabilities, illnesses or other problems.

Another level is the ashram. The ashram is a community of like-minded people who are dedicating themselves to furthering yogic aspirations and to developing a pool, a body, a library of yogic knowledge. The ashram is more like an information bank made up of people who live in the ashram and work in different areas building up the information pool. Many function not as yoga teachers but as researchers, thinkers or developers of a particular system, through experimentation, eventually coming to a point of realization of how yoga works. Developing yogic knowledge and yogic skills is one component.

Another component is that the ashram becomes the ground for experimenting with both yoga and spiritual life. In the ashram you don't have to worry about day-to-day situations, problems or stresses, and you can devote yourself for some time: for a week, for a month, for a year – to explore yourself and also to become part of the community. The purpose of becoming part of the ashram community is to inculcate the disciplines of the ashram, to inculcate the discipline of yoga and to inculcate the discipline of spiritual life. So ashrams have an important role to play.

The next level, after the ashram, is what we call the Yoga Academy, where yoga is continuously being developed and researched. In Australia we have the Satyananda Yoga Academy based at Mangrove Yoga Ashram. In Europe we have the European Yoga Academy. It is an experiment because the base shifts every two years from country to country. First they worked in England for two years, then they shifted to France, then they shifted to Hungary, and this year they have shifted to Bulgaria. In that way they are encouraging the growth

and development of ashrams, centres and teachers, who become the extension of the yoga family. A mobile academy is appropriate for Europe, because Europe is not one country, but many countries with many languages, cultures and mentalities. We are also developing yoga academies in North America and South America. Beyond these, there will be no other yoga academies. Australia, Europe, North America and South America are the four yoga academies to manage the development of yogic knowledge in different regions of the world.

In Asia we have the Bihar School of Yoga. BSY functions as the central yoga academy. From here yogic information goes to the academies and, through that, it filters down to ashrams, through ashrams it filters down to centres, and through centres it goes down to teachers, and from teachers to society. That separation has to be maintained. A centre should not begin to think it is an ashram, ashrams should not think they are academies, each has its role to play.

Yoga and spiritual life

I have been working for yoga since the age of ten. I worked as the head of BSY for twenty-five years. Now I need time to discover yoga, but I cannot do this if I have a legal obligation to fulfil. Swami Sivananda gave Swami Satyananda the mission to spread yoga from door to door. That was his guru seva. Once he had exhausted his karmas, he was free to lead his own sannyasa life. Sri Swamiji left and had nothing to do with Munger anymore. The propagation of yoga was my responsibility. He created Rikhia. I have nothing to do with Rikhia, he has given that responsibility to Swami Satsangi. These are the two aspects of his mission. I look after the yoga work, she looks after the human work. Shakti has to nurture life and Shiva has to look after yoga. There is a clear distinction.

In our life, we should try to combine the spiritual component and the yoga component to realize our nature as a human being. The problem is that the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. Nobody looks at the

greenery of the grass on their side. Many people who come to Munger think Rikhia is nice. Many people who come to Rikhia think Munger is nice. They are totally confused for they don't understand or see the clarity of Sri Swamiji's thought and mission, but he is planting the seed for something beautiful to emerge in the course of time.

Connecting with others

We have seen the emergence of yoga as a positive strength for the development of human society. All over the world, whether they are Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Jews or from other communities, people accept yoga as a means to explore and develop their potentials, but there is also a need to explore the other side. Swami Sivananda always emphasized sadhana to gain personal experience, and then involvement to share the experience, wisdom and strengths with others and help them to come out of their shells. From yama to samadhi is the yoga of Sage Patanjali, and where Patanjali yoga stops, Sivananda yoga begins, from service to, again, final realization at the end. The yoga of Sage Patanjali and the systems developed by the seers over thousands of years is taught in Munger, the yogic head office. Sivananda yoga is the next step, connecting with others, which Sri Swamiji has developed in Rikhia.

Miracles are taking place in Rikhia due to this human connection. In the beginning the people were totally deprived of the basic facilities that we take for granted. The community had no resources to uplift themselves, but through Sivananda Math and the inspiration of Sri Swamiji, they now have ample opportunities to grow and develop, and live with dignity and pride in their achievements. It is definitely a tremendous achievement for Swami Sivananda's teachings to come to this point, where so many people are being uplifted by the support, encouragement and inspiration of Sri Swamiji. We are all part of that. Just because we are yogis doesn't mean that we are disconnected. It is your support which has made it possible for this vision of Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda to become a reality. People from every country have helped to make this sankalpa a reality. A lot is happening,

especially with children, for they are the future generation and if they are given the right samskaras, they will make a better society for tomorrow.

Selfless love becomes bhakti

Swami Sivananda and the scriptures have said that bhakti is not devotion, but an expression of deep love, intense love, nothing more than that. As the love grows more and more inside you, it becomes bhakti in the course of time. Love becomes bhakti when it is selfless. That is the only condition placed on it. Love becomes a limiting factor when it is selfish, self-oriented.

There are two things that can uplift and transform society, mantra and love. People realized this in the past, but they could not discipline themselves. The hippy movement of the 1960s failed, as music became entertainment and love became sensual and carnal. That is the sad reality, but the same cycle is coming back again, with mantra, music, and our need to again discover the feeling of love within. People are exploring the possibility of working with mantra, and working with music to cultivate their sensitive qualities and natures.

Mantra is the first and last initiation in yoga. Sannyasa is not yogic initiation. It is lifestyle initiation, a spiritual initiation, so that you can deepen your understanding of how you can live according to the laws of nature and the divine, and fulfil the needs of body and mind. There has to be a balanced understanding between selfishness and selflessness. We need to survive, so selfish qualities have to support our growth in society, but at the same time, selfless qualities should manifest in our nature. Balance between the selfish and the selfless is what we understand through the lifestyle initiations. We learn how to be out there and earn to survive and how we can be in here, to express the best and most beautiful that we can share with everyone.

Mantra and spiritual life

Mantra is the power which frees the mind from its obsessive selfish, compulsive nature. If the power of sound vibration

can bring this internal change, just imagine how powerful it can be and how, if we apply it properly, it can change our society. Mantras are not words. *Om Namah Shivaya* is not the mantra of Shiva; it existed long before Shiva was identified as a figurehead. *Rama* is not the name of the avatar; it existed long before he came into existence. *Krishna* is not the name of the man who spoke on the *Bhagavad Gita*; it is a mantra which existed thousands of years before he was even born. However, people have identified these mantras with religious figures and ideas due to misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the direction or plan that spiritual life has for every individual.

For the development of spiritual life, we need a plan, a map, and we need to follow the path marked by the person who knows the road, the guru. The guru has to give us a plan of our journey, and we should follow that path with full conviction and understanding that by following it we will one day reach our destination. If you don't follow the path you will get lost. We need to understand how this plan of spiritual life applies to us in our own life. Mantra definitely plays a vital role. It is like the red ink that marks the route. Mantra gives a clear indication of the direction we have to go. The direction is inbuilt in the mantra itself.

As you chant the mantra, the corresponding centres in the body and brain are activated. You are repeating your mantra, but the bulb is lighting up in anahata, in swadhisthana, in manipura, in ajna, and you have to bask in that light. You have to realize that something is lit up now. You should have the vision, to see what is lit up. People are afraid of losing as they are not aware of what they have gained. If you know what you have gained, letting go of something is not a big thing.

Opening the doors of the heart

Mantra also opens the doors of the heart, because it connects you with your inner nature, *ishta*, the spirit with which you identify, residing in your own heart. Once the connection with ishta takes place, then love swells. That love is not selfish, not self-oriented, but it gives others happiness and pleasure. Therefore, bhakti is not devotion, rather it is generation,

cultivation or flowering of love, which is selfless and which connects you with other humans and, through them, to the transcendental divine nature, God.

Bhakti yoga is not blowing the conch, not blessing the flowers in front of your altar, not showing the light to the image on your altar. These may be necessary for your mental discipline, to become a foundation for a personal discipline, but they are not the aim. The ultimate aim of bhakti is to just be overpowered by love, love which knows no distinction between one and the other. This is one quality of love which very few people, the enlightened beings, have experienced. They are the people who were able to come out of their self-oriented shells and radiate the light of love to the rest of the community, because people entered the light of love they were able to change. This is the bhakti that Sri Swamiji is teaching in Rikhia, by using the example of Swami Sivananda's thoughts and philosophy.

When does an action become service? When that action is infused with love. Action without love is not seva, it is employment. We are always working, but there is no love for what we are doing. There is only an awareness that we will be receiving something in return after we have finished the job. So action without love is employment, and action with love is service. That is my understanding.

All the spiritual traditions say that God is love. Love and hatred are the only two things that matter in life. Either you like or you dislike, either you accept or you reject, either you love or you hate. These are the two poles between which life swings. Hate is a conditioned nature of the conditioned body and mind. Love is the free, spontaneous, expansive expression of the liberated mind, which is not craving indulgence, satisfaction and fulfilment for its own contentment and happiness.

Love is the central theme of the teachings of Jesus and the teachings of Buddha. Words, ideas and philosophies can be multifarious, even in yoga, but ultimately everything comes back to bhakti, to the expression of love. Love has to be cultivated through mantra, not by intellect, but by

lighting the bulbs in our hearts. This has to be experienced by putting ourselves through sadhana, so that our energy can break the hard shell. Spiritual love, not sensuality, has to become a power in our life. When it gains in force and power, it breaks the shell of self-oriented awareness, and liberation is experienced, freedom is experienced. This is the journey that we have to undertake: from yoga to humanism.

Become a human being

Until now we have been involved with yoga only. Instead of asking what you can do to awaken your kundalini, ask what you can do to become a better human being. Attraction to something powerful is natural, but what we consider to be powerful is not the real thing. The strength of God is not felt in the storm that lashes out and destroys everything, but in the gentle breeze which brings peace and joy. The softness is the power, the gentleness is the power, love is the power which can change one's life and society.

The more you use mantra, the more you use music, you will feel your heart expand and grow. The application of mantra is becoming more and more universal. First, as an example, mantra was only used as a meditative tool. Then a shift took place and mantras started being sung in the form of kirtans. From meditation it became musical, and again a shift took place. We started to use mantras to enforce the positive nature and qualities of our mind. For example, we practise the Mahamrityunjaya mantra, Gayatri mantra and the Durga mantras in the morning to enforce a positive sankalpa, not an intellectual sankalpa, but the sankalpa which is inherent, the aim, aspiration and the destiny which is inherent in each mantra. The inherent power of the Mahamrityunjaya mantra is wellbeing. The inherent power of the Gayatri mantra is wisdom. The inherent power of the Durga mantra is removing distress.

When the mind is not confusing the association with mantra, then mantra accesses the subconscious level. This is why the three mantras need to be done early in the morning while you are still half asleep. When you open your eyes in bed

and start thinking, “Oh, now I should get up,” at that time, consciously, knowingly, mentally repeat the Mahamrityunjaya mantra eleven times with a sankalpa for total wellbeing. After that, repeat the Gayatri mantra eleven times with a sankalpa to cultivate understanding and wisdom. After that, repeat the Durga mantras once with a sankalpa to overcome and manage the distresses and stresses of life, so that you are in a more harmonious balanced and peaceful state. Just doing this makes a qualitative difference in your life. You will begin to notice the change in your attitudes, performances and expressions within a month. A qualitative difference has been felt by everyone who has done this ‘morning three mantra’ sadhana.

Ultimately, mantras lead to greater harmony between head and heart, and open the doors from where love can manifest. Love is bhakti, and love is the power we all wish to attain. That is what we expect from everyone else too, including God. We expect love from our near and dear ones and we expect love from the higher one. Is there any other expectation beyond this? I don’t think so. Some people can ask for money, that is their immediate need, but that is not the real thing that we receive or expect. Once we receive love, we have everything. Love is what we need. Therefore, love one another as I love you, because Satyam loves us all.

My Guru, Sri Swamiji

How did you come into contact with Sri Swamiji? Can you tell us about your early life with him?

The story begins in 1956 when my parents went to Rishikesh as delegates to the Parliament of World Religions, which was convened by Swami Sivananda. My parents wanted to be initiated by Swami Sivananda, so they approached him. Swami Sivananda looked at them and said, “I will not be your guru, I will be your grandfather. Your guru, your father, will be that person.” My parents looked and for the first time they saw Swami Satyananda, who was about thirty-three. They went to Swami Satyananda and said, “We would like to invite you to our place.” Swami Satyananda said, “When my guru releases me, I shall come,” and that was the end of the talk. Then eight months later my parents received a postcard: “I am coming on this date.” Sri Swamiji came to our town.

So my parents’ association with him began. My parents did not have any children. They came from a well-off family, who were subject to persecution by the British. That was the time of Independence. My father and my grandfather were army commanders of a princely state in India, so they were targets. When the British invaded that princely state, my grandparents had to leave with whatever they had on, and they became paupers overnight. They went to central India to rebuild their lives, and that is where, in 1956, Sri Swamiji came.

That was the turning point because he changed their lives. He rebuilt the lives of my parents and grandparents by

introducing them to spiritual life and taking them under his shelter. It started a connection, a relationship, a friendship, that went very deep. Once, while they were travelling, they went to Gangotri, the place where the Ganga emerges. My parents said to Sri Swamiji, "We have never had a child. All the children have been stillborn." Sri Swamiji said, "How many?" They said, "Seven were stillborn."

Sri Swamiji said, "Sri Krishna also had seven brothers who were stillborn. The eighth one will come with a purpose, but in order to bring life you have to sacrifice something. You cannot keep that child for yourself. You will have to give that child away. If you take the sankalpa, the child will be born to you." They said, "Yes, we'll take the sankalpa." Nine months later a birth took place. Three months before my birth Sri Swamiji gave the name Niranjanananda and three months after I was born, was the first time he took me in his arms, and that is the beginning of my association.

I do not remember what happened in the early days, but my parents told me that even when I was crawling on all fours, I would make an attempt to run away to the railway station. Many times they found me at the railway station, and they knew that this child was not going to stay at home. My aunt gave me new clothes and I told her I didn't like the colours. She forced me to wear them and I tore them off, because the only colour I liked was geru, and that's how the journey started for me.

I came to the ashram in Munger for the first time in 1964 at the age of four. At that time the ashram had no facilities available to look after such a small brat, so, reluctantly, I had to go back. I came again when I was six and I have stayed ever since. All my training and education happened with Sri Swamiji. I don't know how he trained me. All I remember is wrestling with him, sleeping with him, eating with him, tickling him, jumping on his back, jumping on his head. When he sat to give lectures, I would sit in his lap and he would wrap his dhoti so I would be inside it. Those are my earliest memories with him. Those are the memories which I retain till today.

According to him, he trained me in yoga nidra. Only today do I realize that something did happen, for there was no formal school education. It was gurukul education for me, and when there was a demand, the right thing would come out. How it happened, from where it came, even today I cannot explain. I remember an instance in England, where at the age of eleven I had to give a lecture to a group of doctors. I was living in Newcastle at that time. That night when I went to sleep, I was thinking, "What am I going to tell these people? They know so much more than I do. Maybe I can talk to them about pawanmuktasana, how to move the fingers and hands." When I slept, and even today I can recall the dream vividly, in my dream I was giving a lecture and I remembered all the points when I woke up.

When the time came, I spoke those points to the doctors. When I finished, they asked me, "Swami, do you understand what you spoke about?" My heart went wild, but I put up a straight face and said, "Well, if I spoke on it I must know about it," and waited for them to give a comment. They said "You have spoken on biofeedback." I said, "What is biofeedback?" because it was the first time I had heard the term. They said, "Everything that you have spoken about is biofeedback." I said, "Thank you very much." Feeling very happy I walked out of the room. Today when I think, "How did that happen," I can't give an answer. I call it mind sight.

Sri Swamiji said that Swami Sivananda told him to go and teach yoga, even though he had never practised yoga. From where did the information on yoga come? Grace, connection, intuition, whatever name you want to give it. I have had the same experience. I never plan, even today. I go inside the room, feel the people, feel the energy, and begin to speak. That's it. No notes. Whenever I make notes, I always stumble. That has been my experience. Today I can understand that, yes, it was made possible through the practices of yoga nidra, but how it acted on me, I cannot understand or even describe. From the age of eleven till the age of twenty-three, I was out of the country, feeling this connection, feeling this association, feeling this link and developing this relationship,

which never made me desire or wish to be in the presence of Sri Swamiji.

In 1982, when Sri Swamiji came to Puerto Rico, he said, "I want to retire next year and I want you to come back. Will you come back?" I said, "No. My choice is not to come back, for with you my growth will be stunted, but know that if you wish me to come back, there is no power on earth which will hold me back. Your will always prevails because I have surrendered myself." Then, on 20th December 1982, when I returned to the ashram in San Jose, there was a telegram with ticker tape lying there. "Return to India by 19th positively." Only that much. The time had come. It was Christmas time, New Year time. Nothing was available. Offices were closed. Airlines closed. No tickets were available, but when something is meant to happen it always happens.

I left the USA on 14th January, landed in India on 16th January and at midnight on the 16th I was in Munger ashram. When I landed in India, I was landing in a strange country. When I came to Munger, the rickshaw wallah said, "Shall I take you to the old ashram or to the new ashram?" I did not even know we had two ashrams. I said, "Take me to the main one, wherever it is." He took me to Ganga Darshan. Ten o'clock at night I knocked on the main gate. A sleepy-eyed swami yelled from inside, "Who is it?" I said, "My name is Swami Niranjanananda, coming from the USA." There was some movement. It took about half an hour because some phone calls were being made.

Eventually the doors of Ganga Darshan opened. Where am I? Such a big place. Where is the ashram? Where am I supposed to go? The swami had gone back to his room to sleep. There I was standing alone at the gate, thinking, "What do I do now? I am inside the ashram but which building do I go to? Where is the office? Where are the people?" Somehow I saw a light and I walked towards it, and that happened to be Sri Swamiji's room. He had turned on the light because he knew I was coming. I was guided by the light, not by the sannyasins. When I knocked on that door, Swami Satsangi came and said, "Who is it?" I said, "Niranjan." She opened

the gates. Sri Swamiji was sitting inside. He looked at me and said, "You have come. Go to sleep." My bed was next to his bed, in the same room. I went to sleep. That year was the coldest I remember in Munger. Sri Swamiji had built a huge fire in a havan kund in the room. It was roaring and blazing when I woke up, and it was cold and misty outside.

So I opened my eyes at Ganga Darshan on 17th January. On 19th, two days later, there was a committee meeting. Sri Swamiji said, "Let's go out and see the ashram." After about half an hour I was called back. Somebody came and said, "Sri Swamiji is calling you." When I entered the room, all the committee members were sitting there. Sri Swamiji said, "He's the one." He said, "Come and sit." Everybody started to congratulate me and I wondered why. "Congratulations for what?" I said. They said, "You are now the President of the Bihar School of Yoga."

Five days later Sri Swamiji left for Australia. I did not know the people in Munger. I did not know the problems. I did not know anything about the place, and people did not know anything about me. I was a stranger in a strange land which I call my home, but slowly, I came to know everything and somehow I was able to keep my head above water.

That is the story of the association. Of course, there are many other incidents that other people have told you about, but I have given you the broad picture. I was born in a mud hut, not even a brick house, about eight feet wide and twenty feet in length, with a gunny bag down the middle and a thatched roof which leaked every time it rained. That was my home. It was guru's intervention, guru's protection that has made me what I am today. That is the simple story.

How did you become what you are today?

Trust in my guru has made me what I am today. That is a very crucial point to understand. Trust grows spontaneously. Trust which is created and built up can also shatter and change, but trust that is spontaneous, natural and coming from the depth of one's heart never breaks or bends. I feel privileged and lucky to have that understanding and awareness. I knew that

whatever happened, he would be guiding me. He has always wished me well. If a person is always wishing me well, how can I mistrust him. Many times intellect comes in between and says, "I have placed my trust in that person, but today I feel it was misplaced." However, if I realize that person has always meant well, then will that person allow me to deviate from my path? That is the trust that was nurtured inside me.

I always felt that Sri Swamiji was the sculptor who picked up a rock and started to carve it, to remove the extra bits from the rock in order to bring out the image that was inherent in the rock. Chipping away the extra pieces is painful, but with trust I accepted that. If I had said, "This is painful," I would have lost my trust in the sculptor's abilities to carve an image from rock. That trust allowed me to realize that this person is never going to permit me to deviate from my path and my aspiration, and he will always continue to guide me and to shape me in my life. It was that trust which has brought me to this point today, and it is that trust which I will protect with all my forces and strengths. I care for it. That is the force which inspires me today and it will continue to inspire me in the future.

How can I cultivate the guru-disciple relationship? Living in the direct presence of the guru in the ashram is not always practical. How do you recommend I strengthen this bond with you from a distance?

The relationship between guru and disciple is an internal relationship, a faith, a conviction, an understanding, that by following the teachings of the master I can reach my destination. I left India at the age of ten and I returned to India at the age of twenty-three. In thirteen years, I met Sri Swamiji only three or four times. In those days there were no mobile phones, so it was not possible to call him up and speak. With snail mail we would not get a reply to a letter for a month. We had to make trunk calls. At that time there was no dialling system and we had to go through the operator. Books were not published. However, I never felt the physical need for Sri Swamiji in my life. I never craved his physical

presence. The craving was not there for I knew that as long I was true to myself and remained true to the teachings of my guru, he would always be with me.

This is the message to all of you. We crave for physical presence. That may be our need, but in order to create a deeper bond between guru and disciple the teaching has to become the central authority, not the person. Your conviction in the teaching and the application of that teaching in your life will create the inner link with the guru.

When Sri Swamiji left Rishikesh, he did not see Swami Sivananda again, but he was so tuned in to him and his teachings that, while in Munger, he knew the exact moment of Swami Sivananda's departure from the body. He had the vision. That is the link. He was able to know that Swami Sivananda had left his body and he knew that Swami Sivananda had blessed him. We are so bound by the physical presence that we cannot do without it, but as spiritual sadhakas we have to go beyond this mentality at some point in our life. When we see the guru it is a bonus, and when we don't, the teaching continues to inspire us, and if we are true to ourselves, we shall progress. That is my understanding as I have experienced it. Therefore, apply the teachings in your life.

How do we integrate living yoga with family life? Do you have any advice for those with very busy lifestyles?

Firstly, you have to understand the difference between yoga practice and the application of yoga. Yoga practice happens in a classroom environment, in a centre with a teacher for a couple of hours during the week where you learn certain yoga practices. Learning and practising yoga in an ashram, in a centre with a teacher, is different to applying yoga in your home and in your routine. I advise people to use the yoga capsules at different times of the day to manage different situations and to attain relaxation, awareness and concentration.

The application of yoga in family life begins with chanting the three mantras in the morning when you wake up. Begin

with eleven rounds of the Mahamrityunjaya mantra with the sankalpa for health and wellbeing. Then chant the Gayatri mantra eleven times with the sankalpa for understanding and wisdom. After that, chant the thirty-two names of Durga with the sankalpa to remove distress from life and to clear the path for progress. These three mantras are important. Do it in the morning.

When the body is rested, after a good night's sleep, to move the pranas and to remove the blocks from the psychic centres and pranic centres in the body, I recommend four or five asanas: tadasana, tiryak tadasana, kati chakrasana, surya namaskara and one inverted posture. These five asanas are complete in providing the movements the body needs and to remove blocks from the pranic system to ensure the energy flows through the body unimpeded. They should take about twenty minutes to practise.

Just as we recharge our cell phones there is a need to recharge the brain every morning. That happens with the practice of pranayama. Two pranayamas are important. Bhramari pranayama is effective for regulating the hormonal functions internally. *Nadi shodhana pranayama*, alternate nostril breathing, is to build up the capacity to breathe properly. The emphasis should be on counting the ratio. If you can count ten seconds of inhalation and ten of exhalation, that equal length of inhalation and exhalation will help energize the brain, clear the brain and provide inner clarity. These two pranayamas should take about ten minutes to practise.

Do the three mantras, the five asanas and the two pranayamas before you leave for work. When you return home from work, just practise fifteen minutes of yoga nidra before getting involved in the home routine. Fifteen minutes of yoga nidra will help release the stresses and tensions accumulated in daily situations and will centre your focus and attention. After practising yoga nidra, do what you have to do: managing the household, looking after the family, driving, visiting friends.

At night, before going to sleep, do two malas of mantra meditation. In the morning you have the three mantras, late

at night you have your guru mantra. In the morning before you leave home, you practise half an hour of asana and pranayama and when you return home you practise fifteen minutes of yoga nidra. If you do this Monday to Friday, it will be an ideal routine.

On Saturday do the morning mantras and then some hatha yoga cleansing techniques. Neti, kapalbhati and trataka, the three shatkriya practices, should be done on Saturday. Don't ask me if you can do it on Monday too. That is your choice. I am giving you what I feel is appropriate.

On Sunday devote a period of time to jnana yoga and bhakti yoga. Try to know, through the process of jnana yoga, your strengths, limitations and aspirations in life and reflect whether you are moving in the right direction or not. Jnana yoga does not begin with asking yourself, "Who am I?" Jnana yoga begins by applying the SWAN principle, not trying to understand vedantic theory, but understanding the SWAN principle in relation to your life. Through this understanding of the SWAN principle, you are able to water the roots of your life by strengthening the positive, by transforming the limiting and confining qualities, and by understanding and refocusing your aspirations. This is the beginning of jnana yoga. Anybody who thinks: "Who am I? Am I the spirit?" is missing the point, because they are still unable to manage the reactive responses emanating from the mind and personality. The purpose of jnana yoga is initially to manage the reactive responses of your nature so that your mind can be put to rest. Therefore, begin with understanding and applying the SWAN principle. This is the component of jnana yoga.

For the component of bhakti, read something spiritual which can inspire you to discover yourself, practise kirtan, mantra, chanting, connect yourself with nature through a small havan. In that way, gradually you will cultivate understanding and love for your environment and for people around you. Bhakti yoga is not the yoga of devotion; that is a misconception. Bhakti yoga is the yoga to cultivate love in the heart. That love has to be selfless, not self-oriented. Selfless love connects one individual with another and a chain

is created. When the chain is complete, you will realize you were loving God all the time. Cultivating love is the aim of bhakti yoga, not worship, not devotion, not ringing a bell or blowing a conch or placing a flower on the altar. They can become the medium to give you an insight into the experience of affection, love and respect that you can have for your god, for your guru, for your elders, but the culmination of bhakti yoga is the flowering of love in your heart. Therefore, keep Sunday for jnana yoga and bhakti yoga.

If you are so inclined, on Saturday evening do Mahamrityunjaya mantra at home. An audio CD is available to guide you step by step through the chanting of the havan that we do every Saturday, so you can put on the CD and participate in the chanting and make your offering to the fire. This is a good way to start applying the principles of yoga in your daily life. Apart from this, you can go to yoga classes, you can go to centres, you can go to the ashrams, you can join in seminars and programs, but follow this discipline on a regular basis at home, and that will help.

When we witness our attachments to actions and results through karma yoga, always underneath are ever more subtle attachments. Is it thus possible to practise pure seva, prior to self-realization?

If you put one drop of black ink in a cup of water, you will see the water in the cup turn black. How do you make that water clean again? Pour it in a bucket of water. The black ink will dissolve in the clear water. This is the example that Sri Swamiji gives in regard to how we can manage, develop and transcend our attachments. Our attachment is with those people we consider our near and dear ones. We are not attached to strangers at all. Our awareness revolves around those people with whom we are emotionally and mentally connected and attached. At present it is the close family members, children, partners and close relatives, not distant family members.

Attachment grows because of the expectations we place on people for our personal satisfaction and fulfilment. We feel

that we are going to receive something back and therefore we care for those from whom eventually we are going to receive something back. To overcome the attachment, we have to expand our understanding. This understanding comes by realizing one idea – that we are all part of a support system which encourages and nourishes life.

Sri Swamiji has said many times that when you buy things for your children, think you have one extra child. Instead of buying two pair of shoes, buy three. Instead of buying three pair of pants, buy four. Instead of buying two beanies, buy three and give the extra one to an unknown child who is not yours but with whom you can connect with sympathy in your heart. According to your ability, gradually keep on developing your family. As your attachments increase, the dependency of your attachment will decrease and selfless attachment will increase. You will begin to feel that everyone is a part of your family and each one who is part of the family needs support and nourishment, just as you give to your own family member. Once you are able to come out of the self which identifies ‘me and mine’, by bringing in one extra person from outside today, one more a year later and one more in another year, and as you begin to care for these so-called outsiders in the same way that you look after the insiders, attachment will expand outwards. That will become selfless attachment, called *nishkama bhava* in Sanskrit.

This is the teaching that you see in Rikhia. Sri Swamiji had gone there to do his personal sadhana in isolation. What was the need to adopt so many children and so many people and so many villages? He says that he feels peace, contentment and fulfilment, for he has been able to help so many more and give them the inspiration to live with dignity. How to reduce attachment is not a philosophical idea, it is a practical approach. The more you connect with people around you, the less dependent and emotionally attached you become with your own, and you are able to share your love with everyone in equal measure. Eventually a realization comes that each one is a support system for the other, so that life can grow and nurture itself.

When one strips away all the trappings of the ego and sees the effects of experience and conditioning for what they truly are, one finds that once all the layers are peeled off, like the onion, there is nothing left. Where does one go from here?

Come to that point first and then ask me. You haven't even peeled off one layer, so this question is irrelevant. When you come to the point where only a few layers are left, I will instruct you what will happen next. This is not a session on fulfilling your curiosity. What will happen if you become divine and turn the water into wine? This is not a subject for curiosity. Come to that point first and then ask the question. Then you'll understand what I will say.

Given the discussion of the 2012 prophecy, should we take action such as building underground shelters and stockpiling food to prepare ourselves?

If something has to happen, no matter what you do, you will be involved. Here is a true story. When I was working in California in the early 1980s, there was a deep psychological fear that California was going to sink. When minor earthquakes happened, which was quite frequently in that part of the world, naturally the fear of the 'big one' came up. One student decided to shift to another state to protect his family and children from the big one. He escaped California to avoid the big earthquake. Three months later, an earthquake happened in the town where he was living and his house collapsed.

Rather than worrying about it, learn to live life fully, so that when you go, you will go happy that you have lived your life completely and fully. How do we know when we are going to go? Nobody knows what God has in store for us. We think of global warming, which is man-made, but there are many other factors which are not controlled by an individual, but which are cosmic. Never, never, never worry about what will happen in the future, but live your present to the best of your ability. The future is the outcome of the present. If you improve your present, the future will improve. If you destroy

your present, the future is destroyed. This applies to the whole of humanity. We are destroying our present and therefore the future is threatened. If we can build our present, our future is secure and safe. So see what you can achieve today, then tomorrow is another day to achieve and the next day is another day to achieve. Keep on achieving so that when you go, even that will be an achievement.

Is it possible to predominantly follow the path of self-enquiry, of jnana yoga, without being in the physical presence of the guru?

Jnana yoga does not need the presence of the guru. It needs clarity of mind. If you have clarity of mind, you can do it. If you are confused, even gurus can't help you.

Diksha – Learning to See

The word diksha is translated in English as initiation, but the real meaning of *diksha* is to acquire the ability to see. What do we see through diksha? We try to see our spiritual self, our inner self, to come in contact with it and to explore the inherent potentials of our inner nature.

Mantra

From the yogic perspective, there is only one diksha or one initiation, and that is mantra. Whether you are a siddha or a novice, mantra is the final sadhana. Mantra is not a lifestyle initiation. You can change your lifestyle but the mantra remains the same. The word mantra comes from *man*, which is short for manas, and *tra*, which is short for trayati – *manas trayati*. *Mantra* is the power, the force, the energy, which frees the mind from bondage, suppression and limitation. Mantra is a way to harmonize the spiritual body, the emotional body, the mental body and the psychic body, and this internal harmony is reflected in the physical body.

Mantras are sounds heard by yogis in deep states of meditation. Each sound frequency influences a particular psychic centre or *chakra*. Sound frequencies are shown on the petals of the chakra symbols. Each petal has a different sound. These sound frequencies associate with the particular level of consciousness and energy where the chakra is located. For example, *Om* is the seed sound of ajna chakra. When we chant *Om* with awareness at ajna chakra, then gradually we

develop our intuitive abilities. Physiological changes also happen in the brain. The hyperactivity will subside, alpha waves will predominate; in the course of time it may even change to another deeper wave. This indicates physically that the nervous system is relaxing, the activity of the brain slows down, the cerebral tension is decreasing and the mind is becoming more tranquil and peaceful.

Similarly, other mantras are related to different chakras, such as the mantra *Om Namah Shivaya*, the mantra *Hari Om* or any other mantra. The syllables of the mantra vibrate at a particular psychic centre. *Na, ma, shi, va, ya* are all sounds corresponding to different chakras. When you repeat the mantra mentally and identify with the mantra mentally, the subtle frequency created activates these psychic centres. Energy will awaken, another state of mind will be experienced. Clarity, perception, confidence and stamina will be different. When we focus on the sound, without imposing any idea, the sound has a powerful effect and influence on the human nature and personality.

Many people think that *Om Namah Shivaya* is a Shiva mantra and visualize the image of Shiva, but then the mind is diverted from feeling the vibration of the mantra into seeing an image. When you practise mantra, the symbols used should not identify you with an idea associated with the mantra. If you chant *Om Namah Shivaya*, during the mantra practice, do not focus on the image of Shiva but on the symbol, which can be a flame, a star, the sun, anything. If you chant *Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya*, do not concentrate on the image of Krishna as it will divert your attention, and that is not the yogic way. Using the mantra with an image is the religious way, because over time religions have adopted these mantras to deepen their awareness of the higher force. From the yogic perspective the main thrust of concentration is the vibration.

Many people ask about pronunciation of the mantra. The more accurate it is the better. Even in India there are many variations according to the dialects people speak. If you focus on the seed sound, *aim*, or *namah* or *shivaya*, then

the pronunciation which you are used to will guide your consciousness inside. It is not a problem if you deviate a little bit in pronunciation, up to thirty percent deviation is accepted. It all happens at the psychic level, so there is no intellectual imposition.

Mantra can be practised in two ways: one is the simple, spontaneous form, the other is as sadhana. In the simple form of mantra repetition, you can mentally repeat the mantra while doing any normal activity, walking, eating, sitting, reading, writing, cooking, with the eyes open, moving around. It becomes an active meditation. The only restriction is: do not repeat the mantra while you are driving. While doing any other activity, for half a minute, one minute, twenty minutes, an hour, just keep on repeating the mantra and continue with your normal work and normal life. That is the spontaneous, natural way.

The other method is sadhana in which you train and educate your awareness to focus on the mantra. I recommend that mantra meditation be done at night before going to bed, as it will remove psychological stresses and disturbances, and connect you with your inner source of strength, optimism and positivity. After practising the mantra, go to sleep. In the morning your mental state will be different because you were able to release the psychological, subconscious and unconscious stresses, tensions and anxieties, and connect with the feeling of peace within.

While you are practising the two malas in the evening, make it clear to yourself that these ten minutes belong to your spiritual development, and twenty-three hours fifty minutes belong to the world, the family, society, the selfishness, the crookedness, the deviousness that you live. Out of twenty-four hours, ten minutes are for your personal pursuit of spiritual experience. No child, no partner, no worries, no job, nothing. Believe and know that you are free for those ten minutes from every kind of shackle of your own creation, or that binds you. I am not this body, nor the experiences related with the body. I am not this mind, nor the experiences related with the mind. I am just the pure luminous self. With this attitude, practise

two malas of your mantra every evening. This is the mantra sadhana, the disciplined practice of mantra.

When you practise the mantra at night, sit down quietly in a comfortable place of your choice, in your meditation room, in your sadhana room, in your bedroom, but on the floor, not on the bed. Practise *kaya sthairyam*, stillness of the body, for a few minutes, that is the first stage. The second stage is observing the breath for a few minutes. The third stage is becoming aware of the symbol at the eyebrow centre for a few minutes. Then, with the mala, repeat two rounds of your mantra mentally; that is the fourth stage.

Mantra meditation happens in these four stages. It is not just sitting down and starting to do your mantra. First let go of your physical tensions and stresses. Become still. Organize your senses, relax them. Think for a moment, 'I am not the body nor the experiences associated with the body of comfort and discomfort. I am not the mind or the experiences of the mind of happiness and sorrow, pleasure and pain. I am just the luminous self, experiencing peace and harmony'. With this thought disconnect from the external activities of the mind and focus on the stillness and silence inside. In the stillness and silence, observe the movement of the breath ascending and descending from the navel to the eyebrow centre and from the eyebrow centre to the navel.

When awareness comes to the eyebrow centre, ajna chakra, after a few minutes, hold it there and visualize the symbol. The symbol can also be visualized at anahata, the heart region. The most appropriate symbol is the flame, *jyoti*, luminosity. If it is difficult to visualize a flame, visualize any symbol which represents light, luminosity – a star, a pinpoint of light in the distance, an image of the sun, whatever comes naturally and spontaneously and is easy to focus on. The symbol should be light. As you repeat the mantra with awareness on the symbol, feel that the light is pervading your whole body, and think that 'I am the luminous self'. For those ten or fifteen minutes of mantra practice, you are alone. Out of the twenty-four hours of the day, give to the world, your family, your society, your profession: twenty-three hours fifty minutes, and ten minutes

to sadhana, without any external identification. Develop identification with inner luminosity, peace and silence, and practise the mantra in that state.

The tradition says that mantra should be practised in three different ways. The highest form of mantra practice is mental. Say the mantra mentally with awareness, focus and concentration. As the concentration deepens, the mind will go in, sleep will come, disconnection with the senses will happen. You will begin to feel drowsy, you will begin to feel sleepy. At that moment, if you catch yourself, begin whispering the mantra, moving the lips only, not making the sound. This subtle movement will bring the awareness into the mantra again, from drowsiness back to mantra. Just the movement of the lips will draw the concentration back to the mantra. If, after some time, the intensity of sleep, drowsiness and introversion is increasing, begin to say the mantra aloud, meaning audible to you, not yelling. These are the three ways of repeating the mantra.

Mantra is the first and last initiation in yoga. Sri Swamiji says that mantra is the foundation of yoga, the beginning of yoga and the end of yoga. If you can make mantra meditation a part of your daily routine, like eating and sleeping, you will begin to nurture life, to nurture peace within yourselves. Sri Swamiji says, “Through mantra I water this plant every morning and every evening.” He does it twice. I am asking you to begin watering your plant in the evening. As you feel more and more connected with the mantra, you can do it twice or thrice, depending on your time and inclination. In yoga, mantra sadhana is the final process of internalizing the mind and discovering the inner potentials. No matter what one becomes in life, in the future, mantra sadhana has to continue until the end of our days, just as eating and breathing continue until the end of our time.

Sannyasa – lifestyle initiation

Poorna sannyasa, karma sannyasa and jignasu sannyasa are stages of lifestyle initiation. In our tradition, the lifestyle is known as sannyasa. Generally people think sannyasa is

renunciation, or becoming a member of a spiritual club. Many people associate sannyasa with monkhood, priesthood. In this way, according to the inclination and understanding, sannyasa has been identified as a lifestyle which people adopt to pursue a particular goal or direction in life.

Sri Swamiji says that the word sannyasa is composed of *sam*, meaning total, and *nyasa*, meaning trust. Whatever goes into a trust is used only for the purposes of the trust. Sannyasa is a spiritual trust that we create for ourselves, and we place our valuables in that trust. What are our valuables? Our *jnana shakti*, the power of knowledge and wisdom, our *bhava shakti*, the power of sentiments and feelings, and our *karma shakti*, the power of interacting, performing, developing, creating. Jnana shakti represents the head, bhava shakti represents the heart, and karma shakti represents the hands. These are the three valuable items of human life that we place in the trust of sannyasa.

The purpose of sannyasa is to realize the spiritual quality inside and to identify with that quality in order to attain peace, contentment and prosperity. Discovering oneself from the most basic to the most subtle, and applying the qualities and faculties which develop along the path in the most appropriate manner, to uplift others and to uplift one's own spirit when the transcendental consciousness is realized. Seva and sadhana constitute the two limbs of sannyasa. Seva is service, connecting with people, without expectation, only as the fulfilment of your duty and obligation. A doctor at the time of an accident gives his best to the patients dispassionately, without becoming subjective, because if he begins to identify with the patient, his creativity, understanding and objectivity will become less. The total creativity of the mind and body, senses and hands is brought into play. That same quality of awareness has to be cultivated in sannyasa lifestyle.

That is the rule. If you don't want to cultivate this awareness, don't take sannyasa. Just live happily, normally, ever after; but if you are planning to look into sannyasa, you should be aware of what is required of you.

Jignasu sannyasa

Understanding and experimentation begins with jignasu sannyasa. *Jignasu* means an enquirer, a seeker who is desirous of knowing himself, one who is searching for answers, who is exploring, and not yet stable. That is the lifestyle of jignasu. A jignasu is a learner for all times to come. Even in the other initiations, if you can maintain the attitude of a jignasu, a learner, you will be successful. The sadhana of jignasu sannyasa is learning through observation. Observation begins with oneself and extends outwards into society.

Begin this observation with the SWAN sadhana, discovery of the personal traits, mental traits, behavioural traits, emotional traits, selfish traits, selfless traits, spiritual traits, material traits. Discover your strengths, limitations, ambitions and needs. Be clear about it. Then cultivate the strengths, transform the limitations, know what the practical ambitions are and fulfil your needs. This will create a big change in the normal pattern of life. Once you begin to realize your own behaviour, nature and personality, you will be able to improve your interactions, communication and relationships. Even professionally you will be much more aware of situations and instinctively, intuitively, you will know how to deal with them in the best possible manner. That is the sadhana of jignasu sannyasa, fine-tuning of life.

Karma sannyasa

Once you have developed quite a substantial understanding of yourself, and when you feel ready, you can move to the next stage of initiation, which is karma sannyasa. Karma governs and rules every moment of our lives. It is both conscious and unconscious, both willed and autonomic. 'Willed' means that you can move your arms or legs when and how you choose. Autonomic actions are not willed actions: the heartbeat, digestion, expulsion and breathing are autonomic actions. The whole of life is nothing but one action flowing into another, one behaviour becoming another, one thought changing into another, one attitude converting into another. This is *kriya*, continuous, ongoing motion. Action is life.

In this process, actions often become the focus of participation in life at the expense of balanced behaviour, or appropriate understanding, or thinking full of wisdom. As a karma sannyasin, one has to become aware of how one participates, behaves and interacts in the environment, in society, in the world, and with oneself, and try to maintain an objective attitude, free from expectation. Just as we can sit back and watch children play, let one part of the mind sit back and watch the involvement of the other part of the mind. Know that, 'I am free from the influence of the actions being performed by the other aspects of the mind. I am the witness. I don't have greed, I don't have selfishness, I don't have craving, yet I am giving my best'.

Karma sannyasa initiation means trying to achieve excellence in whatever you do, as an engineer, doctor, gardener, home person or administrator. No matter what role you have to play in your life, try to acquire excellence and also immunity from the responses and reactions of actions, relationships and interactions. Sri Swamiji says that for a karma sannyasin it is important to be aware of their performance – intellectual, emotional, physical. As a karma sannyasin, always think that every action is the first and the last one you are doing, even though you may do it routinely every day. Being the first, be totally attentive, and being the last, be absolutely creative. When you do something for the first time, you are very attentive before you become habituated. When you know you are doing it for the last time, you try to do your best and leave a permanent mark. That is the attitude of a karma sannyasin. Be detached from the outcome of your actions. There is a fifty-fifty chance that fifty percent is your action and fifty percent is grace. Grace means that everything becomes conducive to your success. When situations are conducive to your success, then it is called grace. So try to manage your fifty percent in the best manner possible, and don't worry about the remaining fifty percent. It is bound to happen if you improve your fifty percent.

I have lived in the ashram environment practically all my life. Each day, whatever I do, I try to do the best according to

my ability, improve upon it the next day, if the opportunity presents itself, and remain detached from what I'm doing. There is no expectation, but there is an expression of creativity. That is the idea of karma sannyasa: an expression of creativity and no expectation, knowing that whatever one sows will flower in the course of time.

That is the attitude of a karma sannyasin: self-observation, creative expression and remaining detached from expectations. If you involve yourself and identify with expectations, then various reactions do take place, and you are influenced by those reactions. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna tells Arjuna, "Yogis perform actions with the purpose of inner purification." Outer gain happens naturally; you don't have to think about it. You have to think about how you can express yourself in the best possible manner. Efficiency, excellence and creativity are the goals of a karma sannyasin, at all levels, both external and internal.

Poorna sannyasa

Poorna sannyasa is the final jump. It is for a few, not for everybody. It is a life in which you dedicate your totality to pursue one aim, one aspiration. The aim, the aspiration that we follow has already been defined by our paramguru, Swami Sivananda. As poorna sannyasins our aim is the eightfold path of yoga of Sivananda: serve, love, give, purify, be good, do good, meditate, realize. When the entire life is dedicated to this process of connecting externally and internally, connecting cosmically and socially, that is poorna sannyasa. Very few people can live, or have been able to live, the principles and ideals of poorna sannyasa. In India there are over six hundred thousand sannyasins, maybe twenty of whom have experienced the culmination of sannyasa. It is a difficult and hard sadhana, because it involves a life of absolute dedication, trust and commitment to the growth of life itself.

Process of sadhana

There is a story in the Upanishads about three types of beings, divine, demonical and human, who were looking

for a direction in life. There was a thunderstorm and each one heard what they believed to be an instruction from God. The divine being said it was to learn restraint, the demonical being said it was to be compassionate, and the human being said it was to become selfless and share. *Devas*, illumined beings, live in absolute comfort and luxury in heaven. Demons are cruel and violent. Human beings are self-oriented and selfish. So each one heard what was most appropriate for their nature.

These three aspects can also be associated with the sattwic, rajasic and tamasic natures. Tamas is the demonical tendency. To overcome that quality people need to learn compassion. Compassion brings one out of tamas. Sattwa is the godly nature, which becomes effulgent when there is restraint of the senses and mind. Those who are rajasic, humans, who seek self-satisfaction and fulfilment, need to come out of their individual shell and gradually connect with nature, with creation, and through these, with the divine.

In reality you experience the three qualities in your own life. When you are passing through the tamasic phase of your life, you have to connect with the soft sentiments of love and compassion. When you are going through the rajasic phase of life – self-oriented awareness, you have to extend your awareness outwards and become aware of your relationships and connection with everyone around you and the universe. For sattwic tendencies to become stable and effulgent, learn to control the jumping of the senses and mind. This is the process of sadhana that each one has to adopt in life.

The spiritual traditions and philosophies have taken a practical and realistic approach to life. Our journey through life should be recognized as a process through which we can return to the source, and not indulge in this world which binds us even more to our karmas and samskaras and makes the mind negative. The more we bind ourselves with karmas, samskaras, selfish attitudes, aspirations and thoughts, our nature becomes more gross, the personality becomes more aggressive and we express the hard qualities in life.

Weekly sadhana

It is recommended that sadhana should be a weekly activity and involvement. From Monday to Friday follow the five yoga capsules. Practise mantra in the early morning, asana and pranayama mid-morning, relaxation in the evening and meditation at night.

On Saturday, practise the cleansing practices: neti, kapalbhati, trataka. On Saturday evening, chant the Mahamrityunjaya mantra with a sankalpa for the wellbeing of everyone: ourselves, our family, our society, our nation and our world. Thoughts are powerful energies. An appropriate thought can change the world; an appropriate thought can change people's mentalities. Therefore, if you are in a positive state of mind and chant the Mahamrityunjaya mantra with a sankalpa for the wellbeing of everyone, in the course of time, one thought will become an idea, the idea will become an action, the action will decide the direction, and the direction will lead to the culmination of the destiny.

On Sunday, practise jnana yoga and bhakti yoga. Jnana yoga is a way to discover your own nature, starting with the gross and gradually building up to understand the subtle and then the higher nature. Bhakti yoga is to cultivate positivity and harmony, love, trust and faith, through connecting with the spirit.

Personal philosophy

At the same time, you have to develop a personal philosophy. Religion is a social philosophy. In the personal philosophy, you have to incorporate three things: i) restraint of the senses and mind so that there is focus and concentration, not distraction and dissipation, ii) cultivate positive and optimistic strengths, and iii) connect with other people. This is the essence of the teachings of our tradition. Yoga and cultivation of the human nature is the essence of the Satyananda Yoga Tradition.

Once the change begins within, your perception and involvement with the outer world also changes. When we put on dark glasses, we see the world in that colour. When we put

on rosy glasses, we see the world in that colour. When we put on clear glasses, we see the world as it is. Initiation inspires, encourages and motivates you to remove the coloured glasses and see everything clearly. Develop this philosophy in life, where you can be continuously aware and making the effort to acquire excellence in everything that you do. That will be your achievement.

Self-realization is not my aspiration. First I have to build and develop something on which I can ride towards my goal. For this reason the aim of my life is to acquire excellence in how I live, think, act, behave and live. Understanding how to acquire excellence in everything is the goal of my life. If I experience hate, I have to convert that into a positive strength and acquire excellence in it. If I experience love, it is not only for my satisfaction but to uplift other people too. So I do not advocate self-realization, nor do I advocate samadhi. Acquiring excellence is my choice and it is also human destiny. In this drive to acquire excellence, there is restraint, there is connection and bringing out the soft nature of life.

If you are inspired, you can also adopt this philosophy. It will bring fulfilment and happiness. That is the meaning of the word *yoga*, union, coming together in a whole or complete way. When we become whole and healed, we move on to the next stage of evolution. When we move on to the next stage, another set of guidelines and instructions will be given, but in this stage let us fulfil what we have to do now. Let that be our aspiration and our sadhana.

Glossary

- Acharya** – conduct; custom; established rule of conduct
- Adharma** – disharmony; not fulfilling one's natural role in life; unrighteousness
- Adrishta** – unseen; unknown
- Agni tattwa** – fire element
- Aham Brahmasmi** – 'I am Brahman'; one of the four great vedic statements or mahavakyas
- Ahamkara** – faculty of ego; awareness of the existence of 'I'; self-identified mind
- Ahara** – third instinct; craving satisfaction; food or nourishment
- Ahimsa** – absence of violence from within; one of the yamas; according to Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*
- Ajapa japa** – continuous; spontaneous repetition of mantra; meditation practice in which mantra is coordinated with breath; a powerful technique for sense withdrawal which can induce concentration and deep meditation
- Ajna chakra** – psychic centre or vortex situated at the medulla oblongata on the top of the spinal column; corresponding to the pineal gland; seat of intuition; psychic centre where guru's commands are received; 'third eye'
- Akasha** – ether; space
- Amrit** – nectar which bestows immortality
- Anahata chakra** – psychic/pranic centre situated in the spine behind the sternum; associated physically with the cardiac plexus, heart and lungs; mentally with emotion, especially love; and spiritually with atma, the spirit

Ananda – pure bliss; natural state of consciousness

Annamaya kosha – sheath or body of matter; the physical body

Antar darshan – inner vision

Antar mouna – inner silence; meditative technique belonging to the fifth step of raja yoga (pratyahara)

Anushthana – a resolve to perform a sadhana; often mantra sadhana; with absolute discipline for a requisite period of time; a fixed course of sadhana

Aparigraha – non-possessiveness; one of the five yamas; according to Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*

Apas tattwa – water element

Ardhanarishwara – tantric symbol of the half-male/half-female form denoting the two principles of Shiva and Shakti

Arjuna – name of the third Pandava brother; who was the son of Lord Indra and Kunti. In the *Bhagavad Gita* he received a divine revelation from Lord Krishna

Artha – prosperity; material need; accomplishment

Asana – in raja yoga; a physical posture in which one is at ease and in harmony with oneself; third limb of Sage Patanjali's ashtanga yoga; posture for meditation or for health; in hatha yoga; a specific posture to balance and channel energy (prana); open the chakras and remove energy blocks

Ashram – place of spiritual practice and growth through internal and external labour; hermitage; dwelling or abode of asceticism and spiritual practice

Ashtanga yoga – the eight limbs of yoga described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*: yama; niyama; asana; pranayama; pratyahara; dharana; dhyana and samadhi

Atma – the self beyond mind and body; principle of life; highest reality; supreme consciousness; spirit; soul

Atmabhava – feeling of unity with all; seeing the atman (soul) equally in all beings

Aum – the universal cosmic mantra representing the four states of consciousness

Avidya – ignorance of reality

Bhagavad Gita – 'divine song'; Sri Krishna's discourse to his disciple Arjuna delivered on the battlefield of Kurukshetra at the commencement of the great Mahabharata war; one of

the source books of Hindu philosophy; containing the essence of the Upanishads and yoga

Bhakta – devotee

Bhakti – complete devotion to the higher reality of life

Bhakti yoga – branch of yoga in which emotional energy is channelled towards a higher reality of life; a systematic path with nine stages which expand; strengthen; and purify the emotions

Bhava – feeling; love; disposition of mind

Bhaya – fear

Bhramari pranayama – tranquillizing pranayama in which the ears are plugged and a deep soft sound like the humming of bees is made

Bija mantra – seed sound; a basic mantra or vibration

Brahma – the first god in the cosmic trinity; the Creator

Brahma; Vishnu; Shiva – the three aspects of the divine personality associated with creation; preservation and dissolution of the universe; the Hindu trinity

Brahman – ever-expanding; limitless consciousness; name of supreme consciousness or cosmic intelligence according to Vedanta philosophy; monistic concept of absolute reality

Brahmi vritti – spiritual aspect of the vrittis; the self-aware; individual consciousness

Buddha – the enlightened one; referring to the founder of Buddhism

Buddhi – discerning, discriminating aspect of mind; higher intelligence; intuitive aspect of mind

Chakra – a psychic/pranic centre in the subtle body; circle; wheel or vortex; congregation point of the nadis

Chitta – individual consciousness; including the subconscious and unconscious layers of mind; storehouse of memory or samskaras

Chitta shakti – mental force governing the subtle dimensions

Chitta vritti – disposition or state of mind; the inward working of the mind; its mental vision or inward purpose

Daan – unconditional giving

Daksha – celebrated lord of created beings

Dakshinachara – the right-hand path of tantra; path of pranic awakening; one of the five conducts of tantra

Darshan – a glimpse; seeing; observing; sight; vision; knowing

Deepak – light used in ceremonial worship

Deva – higher force or power; a self-luminous being in a male form

Devi – female deity; a self-luminous being in a female form

Dharana – practice of concentration or complete attention; sixth stage of Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*

Dhumralingam – smoky or ill-defined lingam which symbolizes the astral body and our self-concept in mooladhara chakra

Dhyana – spontaneous state of meditation; one-pointedness of mind through concentration on either a form; thought or sound; absorption in the object of meditation; seventh stage of Sage Patanjali's ashtanga yoga

Diksha – birth of a new vision; initiation; dedication of oneself to a particular object

Drashta – witness; uninvolved observer; seer; the inner self; atman or purusha

Durga – remover of difficulties; the beautiful goddess who slays the difficult and even impossible enemies and rides the lion or tiger; the higher state of human consciousness and evolution

Dwesha – repulsion; aversion

Gayatri – a vedic metre of twenty-four syllables; a most famous and sacred mantra suitable for everyone; female counterpart of the Sun

Guna – quality; the three gunas; qualities or aspects of prakriti are sattwa; rajas and tamas

Guru – one who dispels the darkness caused by ignorance

Hari Om Tat Sat – a solemn invocation of divine blessing

Hatha yoga – system of yoga for attaining physical and mental purity by balancing the pranas in the body

Havan – fire ritual

Hridayakasha – psychic space of the heart centre where the creative hues of emotion are observed; experienced between manipura and vishuddhi chakras; associated with anahata chakra

Hridayakasha dharana – vedic meditation process involving concentration on anahata chakra and the heart space

Ichha – wish; desire; will

- Ichha shakti** – creative force or that desire which is the first manifestation of the greater mind
- Ida nadi** – major nadi running on the left side of the spine from mooladhara to ajna through which lunar energy flows; governing the left side of the body and right side of the brain
- Indriya** – sense organ; power of the senses
- Ishta devata** – one's personal deity
- Ishwara pranidhana** – complete dedication to higher consciousness; one of the niyamas described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*
- Jagrat** – conscious mind; state of consciousness related to the senses and the phenomenal material universe
- Japa** – a meditation practice involving repetition of a mantra
- Japa yoga** – yoga of mantra repetition; system of union with the highest through repetition of a mantra and rotation of consciousness
- Jignasu** – aspirant; spiritual seeker
- Jignasu sannyasa** – preliminary stage of sannyasa
- Jiva** – individual soul of man which passes through 8,400,000 yonis to obtain the human form
- Jnana** – knowing; understanding; wisdom; higher knowledge derived from meditation or from inner experience
- Jnanashakti** – power of knowing
- Jnana yoga** – yoga of knowledge and wisdom attained through spontaneous self-analysis and investigation of abstract and speculative ideas; leading a discriminative lifestyle; living with wisdom
- Jnanakanda** – the inner or esoteric portion of the Vedas referring to true higher knowledge; or knowledge of the supreme state of existence as distinguished from knowledge of ceremonial rites
- Jnanendriya** – organ of sense perceptions and knowledge; ears; eyes; nose; tongue and skin
- Jyoti** – small flame; light
- Jyotirlingam** – natural oval-shaped stone worshipped as Shiva; symbol of pure consciousness
- Kalaa** – limiting aspect of energy which restricts the creative power of individual consciousness and body; the manifest universe of time and space

Kali Yuga – the age of Kali; which lasts 432,000 years and is the fourth and current era (yuga) of the world now more than 5,000 years old; dark; evil; difficult and full of strife; fourth or present age

Kalpa – aeon; era; one day in the life of Brahma (4,320,000,000 human years)

Kama – emotional; sensual love; lust

Kapalbhati – one of the six major cleansing techniques of hatha yoga; a process of clearing the cranial region using the breath or water to reduce phlegm

Karma – action and result; law of cause and effect

Karmakanda – the part of the Vedas that relates to sacrificial rules and ceremonial acts on the physical level

Karma sannyasa – householder sannyasa; renunciation combined with duty

Karma shakti – power of action

Karma yoga – yogic path of action; union with the supreme consciousness through action; action without attachment to the fruits of action; action performed with meditative awareness; dynamic spirituality; yogic path of selfless service

Karmendriyas – five physical organs of action: hands; feet; vocal cords; excretory and reproductive organs

Karta – doer; one who acts

Karuna – mercy; compassion; kindness

Kaya sthairyam – practice of absolute steadiness and awareness of the physical body; often performed as a preparation for pranayama or meditative states

Khechari mudra – tongue lock

Kirtan – singing of God's name

Krishna – black; dark blue; eighth incarnation of Vishnu; his teachings to his friend and disciple Arjuna during the Mahabharata war are immortalized in the *Bhagavad Gita*

Kriya shakti – power or faculty of acting

Kriya yoga – practices of kundalini yoga designed to speed the evolution of humanity

Krodha – anger; aggression

Kundalini shakti – also referred to as ‘kundalini’; potential energy lying dormant in mooladhara chakra; often referred to as the ‘serpent power’

Kundalini yoga – path of yoga which awakens the dormant spiritual force

Laya yoga – yoga of conscious dissolution of individuality

Lila – literally; ‘play’; diversion; pleasure; activity of prakriti and its three gunas

Lingam – idol of Shiva; a naturally formed oval stone; often means the shivalingam; an archetypal symbol

Lobha – greed

Mahamrityunjaya mantra – the ‘great victory over death’ mantra; used to avoid calamities; for overcoming the fear of death

Mahavir – a propagator of the Jain religion

Mahavakyas – four great statements of the Upanishads

Maithuna – physical union; the first basic instinct

Mala – garland; necklace; rosary; an aid in mantra repetition

Manas – reflective; logical; rational mind; the mind concerned with senses; thought and counter-thought; perception; intelligence

Manipura chakra – psychic/pranic centre situated in the spine behind the navel; associated with the solar plexus and digestive organs and mentally with willpower; source of vitality and energy

Manomaya kosha – sheath or body of mental experience

Mantra – subtle sound vibration; tantric tool which liberates energy from the confines of mundane awareness and expands the consciousness when repeated

Mantra yoga – path of yoga which liberates the mind through sound vibration

Matra – time interval in pronouncing a vowel

Matsyendranath – one of the founders of hatha yoga

Maya – means by which Brahman creates the phenomenal world; power of creation; illusive power

Moha – delusion; infatuation

Moksha – liberation from the cycles of birth and death and the illusion of maya

Mooladhara chakra – the lowest psychic/pranic centre in the human body; situated in the perineal floor in men and the cervix in women; associated mentally with the instinctive nature; spiritually it is the seat of kundalini

Mouna – silence; measured silence; remaining silent for a specified span of time

Mukti – liberation from the chain of birth and death and from the illusion of maya

Nada – subtle sound vibration heard in the meditative state

Nadi shodhana pranayama – a pranayama which purifies and balances ida and pingala nadis by alternate nostril breathing

Narada – name of a celebrated devarishi; one of the ten messengers from the gods; author of the *Narada Bhakti Sutras*

Narayana – ‘companion of man’; epithet of Vishnu; the supporter of life

Neti – one of the six major cleansing techniques of hatha yoga; nasal cleansing with liquid; such as saline water

Nirakara – without form; formless; unmanifest

Nidra – fourth instinct; deep sleep; isolation from the mind and senses

Nirodha – cessation

Nirvana – cessation of suffering; final liberation or emancipation in Buddhist thought

Nishkama karma – action done without desire

Niyama – five rules of personal discipline: *shaucha*; purity; *santosha*; satisfaction or contentment; *tapas*; austerity or penance; *swadhyaya*; self-study and *Ishwara pranidhana*; dedication to the Lord or to the highest principle; second limb of Sage Patanjali’s ashtanga yoga

Paramatma – cosmic soul or consciousness; supreme spirit

Parvati – ‘daughter of the mountain’; goddess and consort of Shiva

Pashu – animal; brute; beast; in tantra it refers to a person living at the instinctive animal level of consciousness

Pashupata tantra – first tantra given by Shiva to Parvati; one becomes aware of the relationship that exists between one’s self and the divine in the form of master and servant

Patanjali, Sage – author of the *Yoga Sutras*; an ancient rishi who codified the system of raja yoga, including ashtanga yoga

- Pinda** – the foetus or embryo in an early stage of gestation; the body; corporeal frame
- Pingala nadi** – a major pranic channel in the body which conducts the dynamic pranic force manifesting as prana shakti from the right side of mooladhara chakra; criss-crossing the spine through the major chakras to the right side of ajna chakra
- Pooja** – ritual worship to bring the devotee into the proximity of God
- Prakriti** – nature; manifested shakti; manifest and unmanifest nature composed of the three gunas
- Prana** – vital energy force sustaining life and creation; permeating the whole of creation and existing in both the macro-cosmos and micro-cosmos
- Prana shakti** – dynamic solar force governing the dimension of matter; energy flow related to externalization of mind
- Pranayama** – a series of techniques for controlling and expanding the dimension of prana; fourth limb of Sage Patanjali's ashtanga yoga
- Pratyahara** – restraining the sensory and motor organs; withdrawal and emancipation of the mind from the domination of the senses and sensual objects; training the senses to follow the mind within; fifth stage described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*
- Prithvi tattwa** – earth element
- Purusha** – pure consciousness according to Samkhya philosophy; undefiled and unlimited by contact with prakriti or matter
- Raga** – passion; attachment
- Raja yoga** – the supreme yoga; union through control of the mental processes and concentration of mind
- Rajas** – one of the three gunas or attributes; dynamism; state of activity; creativity combined with full ego involvement
- Rama** – the seventh avatara of Vishnu and embodiment of dharma; hero of the epic *Ramayana*; a heroic and virtuous king
- Ramayana** – one of the most famous ancient Indian epics; relating the life of Rama
- Rigveda** – oldest of the four Vedas (vedic texts) and the most ancient sacred book of the Hindus
- Rishi** – seer; realized sage; one who contemplates or meditates on the self

- Sadhaka** – one who practises sadhana; a spiritual aspirant
- Sadhana** – spiritual practice or discipline performed regularly for the attainment of inner experience
- Sahasrara chakra** – abode of Shiva or superconsciousness; highest chakra or psychic centre; it symbolizes the threshold between the psychic and spiritual realms and is located at the crown of the head
- Sakara** – with form; manifest
- Samadhana** – mental equilibrium; constant concentration on reality; fixing the mind in profound abstract contemplation on the true nature of the self; steadiness; peace (of mind)
- Samadhi** – culmination of meditation; state of unity with the object of concentration and the universal consciousness; balanced wisdom; the eighth stage of raja yoga
- Samatvam** – equipoise
- Samkhya** – one of the six systems of Indian philosophy; spiritual science based on the division of all existence into the two eternal principles of purusha and prakriti; and the twenty-three elements of creation
- Samsara** – Illusory world; unending cycle of birth and death
- Samskara** – mental impression stored in the subtle body as an archetype
- Sankalpa** – positive resolve; willpower; determination
- Sannyasa** – dedication; complete renunciation of the world; its possessions and attachments
- Santosh** – contentment; satisfaction; one of the five niyamas in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*
- Satchidananda** – the supreme reality; truth-consciousness-bliss
- Satsang** – gathering in which the ideals and principles of truth are discussed; association with the wise and the good; along with the resolve and effort to express this in life
- Sattwa** – one of the three gunas or attributes of nature; state of luminosity; harmony; equilibrium and purity
- Satya** – true; real; honest; sincere; truthful; absolute truth; reality; one of the yamas described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*
- Satyam** – truth; unchanging principle
- Satya Yuga** – the age in which piety and righteousness predominated and the first of the four aeons (yugas) of the world

- Sayujya** – final union; abiding in the absolute
- Seva** – serving the divine in others; first stage of Swami Sivananda's ashtanga yoga
- Shakti** – primal energy; manifest consciousness; power; strength; energy; counterpart of Shiva
- Shandilya** – name of a rishi in the lineage of the great Sage Kasyapa; author of the *Shandilya Bhakti Sutras*
- Shanti** – peace; tranquillity; complete indifference to all worldly enjoyment
- Shatkriya/shatkarma** – the original group of six purificatory techniques of hatha yoga: neti; dhauti; nauli; basti; tratika; kapalbhata
- Shiva** – the first or original yogi; cosmic consciousness; counterpart of Shakti; destroyer of ego and duality
- Shivalingam** – black oval-shaped stone (those occurring naturally in the Narmada river are especially revered); symbol of Shiva; symbol of consciousness
- Shoonya** – void; state of transcendental consciousness
- Siddha** – perfected being
- Siddhantachara** – one of the five conducts of tantra which has a positive, perfect end
- Soham** – mantra used in ajapa japa; said to be the unconscious repetitive prayer produced by the breath
- Spandan** – movement; vibration; cosmic vibration; dynamic aspect of Shiva
- Surya namaskara** – 'salute to the sun'; a series of twelve asanas for revitalizing prana
- Sushupti** – deep sleep or unconscious realm of mind
- Swadhisthana chakra** – second psychic/pranic centre; located in the coccyx; associated with the sacral plexus and governing the uro-genital system; storehouse of subconscious impressions
- Swadhyaya** – self-observation; self-study; continuous conscious awareness of what one is doing; one of the niyamas recommended by Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*; study of the scriptures and texts of yoga and self-knowledge
- Swaha** – mantra chanted to accompany the physical act of offering an oblation to the sacrificial fire
- Swapna** – subconscious realm of mind; state of dreaming

Swaroopa – one's own form or shape; natural state or condition

Tamas – one of the three gunas or attributes of nature; inertia; stability; ignorance; darkness; unwillingness to change

Tanmatra – subtle nature; quality or essence of the elements

Tanoti – to expand; stretch; extend

Tantra – most ancient universal science and culture which deals with the transition of human nature from the present level of evolution and understanding to a transcendental level of knowledge; experience and awareness; a particular path of sadhana; including mantra; yantra and other esoteric practices

Tapasya – practice of austerity

Tattwa – element

Titiksha – endurance

Trataka – a concentration practice of gazing with unblinking eyes at one point to focus the mind; a cleansing practice of hatha yoga

Trayate – to liberate

Turiya – superconsciousness

Upanishads – ancient vedic texts containing dialogues and discussions on the nature of the absolute and the path leading towards it

Upasana – personalized form of worship; sitting near; worshipping or contemplating on God or a deity; devout meditation

Upasandakanda – ritual of worship

Vairagya – non-attachment; absence of sensual craving and desires; detachment; supreme dispassion

Vamachara – tantric path of awakening and controlling the subtle forces of the mind; left-hand path of tantra

Vayu tattwa – air element

Veda – sacred knowledge; holy learning; the most ancient and authentic scripture of the Sanatan dharma composed before 5000 BC; revealed to sages and seers and expressing knowledge of the whole universe

Vedachara – tantric path of wisdom; living according to eternal human values; one of the five conducts of tantra

Vedanta – one of the six principle systems of Indian philosophy; based primarily on the Upanishads; the doctrine of non-dualism (Advaita)

Vidya – inner knowledge; higher knowledge; spiritual knowledge

- Vishnu** – preserver of the universe; supreme consciousness; the second deity of the Hindu trinity; entrusted with the preservation of the world
- Viveka** – discrimination; right knowledge or understanding
- Viyoga** – separation
- Vritti** – a modification arising in the mind related to a thought pattern
- Yajna** – worship through sacrifice or sacrificial rite for internal and external purification; offering oblations to the fire; any work beneficial for one and all
- Yama** – five self-restraints or rules of conduct: *satya*; truthfulness; *ahimsa*; non-violence; *asteya*; non-stealing; *aparigraha*; non-covetousness; and *brahmacharya*; continence; first limb of Sage Patanjali's ashtanga yoga
- Yantra** – geometric symbol designed for concentration or meditation in order to unleash the hidden potential within the consciousness; visual form of mantra used for concentration and meditation
- Yoga** – union; a system of practice leading to a state of union between the individual and universal awareness; practices; philosophy and lifestyle to achieve peace; power and spiritual wisdom as well as perfect health; a sound mind and a balanced personality; one of the six main systems of Indian philosophy
- Yogachara** – the path of unity between body; mind and spirit; one of the five conducts of tantra
- Yogamaya** – the power of divine illusion
- Yoga nidra** – 'psychic sleep'; pratyahara practice inducing deep relaxation
- Yoga Sutras** – ancient authoritative text on raja yoga by Sage Patanjali
- Yogi** – an adept of yoga; follower of the yoga system of philosophy and practice
- Yoni** – womb
- Yuga** – an age; epoch or cycle of earth and mankind; the four being Satya Yuga; Treta Yuga; Dwapara Yuga and the present Kali Yuga

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Swami Niranjanananda was born in Rajnandgaon (Chhattisgarh) in 1960. Guided from birth by his guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, he came to live at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger at the age of four where he received training in yogic and spiritual sciences through yoga nidra. In 1971 he was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa, and for twelve years he lived overseas, acquiring an understanding of different cultures and helping further his guru's mission to spread yoga 'from door to door and shore to shore'.



He returned to India in 1983 to guide the activities of Bihar School of Yoga, Sivananda Math and Yoga Research Foundation at Ganga Darshan. In 1990 he was initiated as a paramahansa sannyasin and in 1993 anointed spiritual preceptor in succession to Swami Satyananda Saraswati. He established Bihar Yoga Bharati, the first university of yoga, in 1994, Yoga Publications Trust in 2000, and a children's yoga movement, Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, in 1995. He travelled extensively to guide seekers around the world until 2009, when he received the command to commence a new phase of sannyasa life.

In 2010, he established Sannyasa Peeth, to enable seekers to experience the spiritual and cultural traditions of India in their essence. The year marked his entry into a phase of higher sadhana and tirtha yatra.

In 2013, he conducted the World Yoga Convention in Munger to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, and launched a new era of yogic renaissance. In 2013 he also commenced the arduous panchagni sadhana. In 2014, he embarked on a Bharat Yatra, an all-India tour, transmitting the gift of yoga to all. Since then, Swami Niranjan has been working to develop the next stage of yogic training and teaching, and has initiated several programs to help people deepen their experience of yoga and imbibe the traditional wisdom. Simultaneously, he has revived various ancient knowledge systems and practices of India.

In 2017, he received the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award given by the Government of India, for the outstanding work in the field of yoga.

Author of many classic books on yoga and other spiritual streams, Swami Niranjan is a magnetic source of wisdom on all aspects of yogic philosophy, practice and lifestyle. He ably combines tradition with modernity as he continues to work for his guru's mission.



SATYANANDA YOGA
BIHAR YOGA

“The spiritual path is the path of a gardener, not of a warrior. We are all waiting for the flowering of the beauty of our nature, but we don’t know how it can happen, how to water the dry earth, how to plant the right seeds and how to take care of them. Once we have that skill, there is no stopping the experiences of human evolution and comfort, joy, wisdom, peace and prosperity.”

The sixth volume of *Yoga Sadhana Panorama* presents discourses and satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati. Part One is a compilation of talks delivered during his 2006 tour of Australia, Italy, Slovenia, Germany and France. Part Two consists of Swami Niranjan’s individual programs and satsangs held in 2008 in Australia, Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary, Greece and Bulgaria. In Part Three, presents Swami Niranjan’s in-depth talks on spiritual life given in Australia, in Rocklyn Yoga Ashram and Mangrove Yoga Ashram.

A wide range of topics, including tantra, bhakti yoga, spiritual and yogic lifestyle, wellbeing, mind management and consciousness, presented with wisdom, understanding, practical guidance and humour are a constant inspiration to the reader.

